



# *Dangerous Acquaintances*

*by*

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*With Illustrations*

*by*

ALASTAIR

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## LETTER THE FIRST

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay, at the  
Ursulines of . . .*

**Y**ou see, my dear friend, that I keep my word to you, and that bonnets and frills do not take up all my time; there will always be some left for you. However, I have seen more adornments in this one single day than in all the four years we passed together; and I think that the superb Tanville will have more vexation at my first visit, when I shall certainly ask to see her, than she has ever fancied that she afforded us, when she used to come and see us *in flocchi*. Mamma has consulted me in everything; she treats me much less as a school-girl than of old. I have a waiting-maid of my own; I have a room and a closet at my disposition; and I write this to you at a very pretty desk, of which I have the key, and where I can lock up all that I wish. Mamma has told me that I am to see her every day when she rises, that I need not have my hair dressed before dinner, because we shall always be alone, and that then she will tell me every day where I am to see her in the afternoon. The rest of the time is at my disposal, and I have my harp, my drawing, and books as at the convent, only there is no Mother Perpétue here to scold me, and it is nothing to anybody but

myself, if I choose to do nothing at all. But as I have not my Sophie here to sing and laugh with, I would just as soon occupy myself.

It is not yet five o'clock; I have not to go and join Mamma until seven : there's time enough, if I had anything to tell you! But as yet they have not spoken to me of anything, and were it not for the preparations I see being made, and the number of milliners who all come for me, I should believe that they had no thought of marrying me, and that that was the nonsense of the good Joséphine. However, Mamma has told me so often that a young lady should stay in the convent until she marries that, since she has taken me out, I suppose Joséphine was right.

A carriage has just stopped at the door, and Mamma tells me to come to her at once. If it were to be the Gentleman! I am not dressed, my hand trembles and my heart is beating. I asked my waiting-maid if she knew who was with my mother. "Certainly," she said, "it's Monsieur C<sup>...</sup>." And she laughed. Oh, I believe 'tis he! I will be sure to come back and relate to you what passes. There is his name, at any rate. I must not keep him waiting. For a moment, adieu.....

How you will laugh at your poor Cécile! Oh, I have really been disgraceful! But you would have been caught just as I. When I went in to Mamma, I saw a gentleman in black standing by her. I bowed to him as well as I could, and stood still without being able to budge an inch. You can imagine how I scrutinized him.

"Madame," he said to my mother, as he bowed to me, "what a charming young lady! I feel more than ever the value of your kindness." At this very definite remark, I was seized with a fit of trembling, so much so that I could hardly stand : I found an arm-chair and sat down in it, very red and disconcerted. Hardly was I there, when I saw the man at my feet. Your poor Cécile quite lost her head; as Mamma said, I was absolutely terrified. I jumped up, uttering a piercing cry, just as I did that day when

it thundered. Mamma burst out laughing, saying to me, " Well! what is the matter with you? Sit down, and give your foot to Monsieur." Indeed, my dear friend, the gentleman was a shoe-maker. I can't describe to you how ashamed I was; mercifully there was no one there but Mamma. I think that, when I am married, I shall give up employing that shoe-maker.

So much for our wisdom—admit it! Adieu. It is nearly six o'clock, and my waiting-maid tells me that I must dress. Adieu, my dear Sophie, I love you, just as well as if I were still at the convent.

P. S. I don't know by whom to send my letter, so that I shall wait until Joséphine comes.

Paris, 3rd August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SECOND

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont,  
at the Château de. . .*

COME back, my dear Vicomte, come back; what are you doing, what can you be doing, with an old aunt, whose whole property is settled on you! Set off at once; I have need of you. I have an excellent idea, and I should like to confide its execution to you. A very few words should suffice; and only too honoured at my choice, you ought to come, with enthusiasm, to receive my orders on your knees : but you abuse my kindness, even since you have ceased to take advantage of it, and between the alternative of an eternal hatred and excessive indulgence, your happiness demands that my indulgence wins the day. I am willing then to inform you of my projects, but swear to me like a faithful cavalier that you embark on no other adventure till this one be brought to an end. It is worthy of a hero : you will serve both love and vengeance; it will be, in short, one *rouerie* the more to include in your Memoirs; yes, in your Memoirs, for I wish them to be printed, and I will charge myself with the task of writing them. But let us leave that, and come back to what is occupying me.

Madame de Volanges is marrying her daughter : it is still a

secret, but she imparted it to me yesterday. And whom do you think she has chosen for her son-in law? The Comte de Gercourt. Who would have thought that I should ever become Gercourt's cousin? I was furious.... Well! do you not divine me now? Oh, dull brains! Have you forgiven him then the adventure of the *Intendante*! And I, have I not still more cause to complain of him, monster that you are? But I will calm myself, and the hope of vengeance soothes my soul.

You have been bored a hundred times, like myself, by the importance which Gercourt sets upon the wife who shall be his, and by his fatuous presumption, which leads him to believe he will escape the inevitable fate. You know his ridiculous prejudice in favour of the discretion of *blondes*. In fact, I would wager, that for all that the little Volanges has an income of sixty thousand livres, he would never have made this marriage if she had been dark or had not been bred at the convent. Let us prove to him then that he is but a fool : no doubt he will be made so one of these days; it isn't that of which I am afraid; but 'twould be pleasant indeed if he were to make his *début* as one! How we should amuse ourselves on the day after, when we heard him boasting, for he will boast; and then, if you once form this little girl, it would be a rare mishap if Gercourt did not become, like another man, the joke of all Paris.

For the rest, the heroine of his new romance merits all your attentions ; she is really pretty; she is only fifteen, a rose-bud, *gauche* in truth, incredibly so, and quite without affectation. But you men are not afraid of that; moreover, a certain languishing glance, which really promises great things. Add to this that I exhort you to it : you can only thank me and obey.

You will receive this letter to-morrow morning. I request that to-morrow, at seven o'clock in the evening, you may be with me. I shall receive nobody until eight, not even the reigning Chevalier : he has not head enough for such a mighty piece of work.



You see that love does not blind me. At eight I will grant you your liberty, and you shall come back at ten to sup with the fair object; for mother and daughter will sup with me. Adieu, it is past noon : soon I shall have put you out of my thoughts.

Paris, 4th August, 1777.

## LETTER THE THIRD

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay*

I know nothing as yet, my dear friend. Mamma had a great number of people to supper yesterday. In spite of the interest I took in regarding them, the men especially, I was far from being diverted. Men and women, everybody looked at me mightily, and then would whisper to one another, and I saw they were speaking of me. That made me blush; I could not prevent myself. I wish I could have, for I noticed that, when the other women were looked at, they did not blush: or perhaps 'tis the rouge they employ which prevents one seeing the red that is caused by embarrassment; for it must be very difficult not to blush when a man stares at you.

What made me most uneasy was that I did not know what they thought in my regard. I believe, however, that I heard two or three times the word *pretty*; but I heard very distinctly the word *gauche*; and I think that must be true, for the woman who said it is a kinswoman and friend of my mother; she seemed even to have suddenly taken a liking to me. She was the only person who spoke to me a little during the evening. We are to sup with her tomorrow.

I also heard, after supper, a man who, I am certain, was speaking of me, and who said to another, " We must let it ripen; this winter we shall see." It is, perhaps, he who is to marry me, but then it will not be for four months! I should so much like to know how it stands.

Here is Joséphine, and she tells me she is in a hurry. Yet I must tell you one more of my *gaucheries*. Oh! I am afraid that lady was right!

After supper they started to play. I placed myself at Mamma's side; I do not know how it happened, but I fell asleep almost at once. I was awakened by a great burst of laughter. I do not know if they were laughing at me, but I believe so. Mamma gave me permission to retire, and I was greatly pleased. Imagine, it was past eleven o'clock. Adieu, my dear Sophie; always love your Cécile. I assure you that the world is not so amusing as we imagined.

Paris, 4th August 1777.

## LETTER THE FOURTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil,  
at Paris*

**Y**OUR commands are charming; your fashion of conveying them is more gracious still; you would make us in love with despotism. It is not the first time, as you know, that I have regretted that I am no longer your slave : and *monster* though I be, according to you, I never recall without pleasure the time when you honoured me with sweeter titles. Indeed, I often desire to merit them again, and to end by setting, with you, an example of constancy to the world. But greater interests call us; to conquer is our destiny, we must follow it; perhaps at the end of the course we shall meet again; for, may I say it without vexing you, my fairest Marquise? you follow it at least as fast as I : and since the day when, separating for the good of the world, we began to preach the faith on our different sides, it seems to me that, in this mission of love, you have made more proselytes than I. I know your zeal, your ardent fervour; and if that god of ours judged us by our works, you would one day be the patroness of some great city, whilst your friend would be at most but a village saint. This language astounds you, does it not? But for the last week I hear and speak no other,

and it is to perfect myself in it that I am forced to disobey you.

Listen to me and do not be vexed. Depositary of all the secrets of my heart, I will confide to you the most important project I have ever formed. What is it you suggest to me? To seduce a young girl, who has seen nothing, knows nothing, who would be, so to speak, delivered defenceless into my hands, whom a first compliment would not fail to intoxicate, and whom curiosity will perhaps more readily entice than love. Twenty others can succeed and these as well as I. That is not the case in the adventure which engrosses me; its success insures me as much glory as pleasure. Love, who prepares my crown, hesitates, himself, betwixt the myrtle and the laurel; or rather he will unite them to honour my triumph. You yourself, my fair friend, will be seized with a holy veneration and will say with enthusiasm, " Behold a man after my own heart! "

You know the Présidente de Tourvel, her piety, her conjugal love, her austere principles. She it is whom I am attacking; there is the foe meet for me; there the goal at which I dare to aim :

*Et si de l'obtenir, je n'emporte le prix  
J'aurai du moins l'honneur de l'avoir entrepris.*

One may quote bad verses when a good poet has written them. You must know then that the President is in Burgundy, in consequence of some great law-suit : I hope to make him lose one of greater import! His disconsolate better-half has to pass here the whole term of this distressing widowhood. Mass every day; some visits to the poor of the district; morning and evening prayers, solitary walks, pious interviews with my old aunt, and sometimes a dismal game of whist, must be her sole distractions. I am preparing some for her which shall be more efficacious. My guardian angel has brought me here, for her happiness and my own. Madman that I was, I regretted twenty-four hours which I was sacrificing to my respect for the conventions. How I should be punished

if I were made to return to Paris! Luckily, four are needed to play whist; and as there is no one here but the *cure* of the place, my eternal aunt has pressed me greatly to sacrifice a few days to her. You can guess that I have agreed. You cannot imagine how she has cajoled me since then, above all how edified she is at my regularity at prayers and mass. She has no suspicion what divinity I adore.

Here am I then for the last four days, in the throes of a doughty passion. You know how keen are my desires, how I brush aside obstacles to them : but what you do not know is how solitude adds ardour to desire. I have but one idea; I think of it all day and dream of it all night. It is very necessary that I should have this woman, if I would save myself from the ridicule of being in love with her : for whither may not thwarted desire lead one? O delicious pleasure! I implore thee for my happiness, and above all for my repose. How lucky it is for us that women defend themselves so badly! Else we should be to them no more than timid slaves. At present I have a feeling of gratitude for yielding women which brings me naturally to your feet. I prostrate myself to implore your pardon, and so conclude this too long epistle.

Adieu, my fairest friend, and bear me no malice.

At the Château de . . ., 5th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FIFTH

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont*

**D**o you know, Vicomte, that your letter is of an amazing insolence, and that I have every excuse to be angry with you? But it has proved clearly to me that you have lost your head, and that alone has saved you from my indignation. Like a generous and sympathetic friend, I forget my wrongs in order to concern myself with your peril; and tiresome though argument be, I give way before the need you have of it, at such a time.

You, to have the Présidente de Tourvel! The ridiculous caprice! I recognize there your froward imagination, which knows not how to desire aught but what it believes to be unattainable. What is the woman then? Regular features, if you like, but no expression; passably made, but lacking grace; and alway dressed in a fashion to set you laughing, with her clusters of fichus on her bosom and her body running into her chin! I warn you as a friend, you need but to have two such women, and all your consideration will be lost. Remember the day when she collected at Saint-Roch, and when you thanked me so for having procured you such a spectacle. I think I see her still, giving her hand to that

great gawk with the long hair, stumbling at every step, with her four yards of collecting-bag always over somebody's head, and blushing at every reverence. Who would have said then that you would desire this woman? Come, Vicomte, blush too, and be yourself again! I promise to keep your secret.

And then, look at the disagreeables which await you! What rival have you to encounter? A husband! Are you not humiliated at the very word? What a disgrace if you fail! and how little glory even if you succeed! I say more; expect no pleasure from it. Is there ever any with your pruders? I mean those in good faith. Reserved in the very midst of pleasure, they give you but a half-enjoyment. That utter self-abandonment, that delirium of joy, where pleasure is purified by its excess, those good things of love are not known to them. I warn you: in the happiest supposition, your *Présidente* will think she has done everything for you, if she treats you as her husband; and in the most tender of conjugal *tête-à-têtes* you are always two. Here it is even worse; your prude is a *dévote*, with that devotion of worthy women which condemns them to eternal infancy. Perhaps you will overcome that obstacle; but do not flatter yourself that you will destroy it: victorious over the love of God, you will not be so over the fear of the Devil; and when, holding your mistress in your arms, you feel her heart palpitate, it will be from fear and not from love. Perhaps, if you had known this woman earlier, you would have been able to make something of her; but it is two-and-twenty, and has been married nearly two years. Believe me, Vicomte, when a woman is so *incrusted* with prejudice, it is best to abandon her to her fate; she will never be anything but a *puppet*.

Yet it is for this delightful creature that you refuse to obey me, bury yourself in the tomb of your aunt, and renounce the most enticing of adventures, and withal one so admirably suited to do you honour. By what fatality then must Gercourt always hold some advantage over you? Well, I am writing to you without



temper : but, for the nonce, I am tempted to believe that you don't merit your reputation; I am tempted, above all, to withdraw my confidence from you. I shall never get used to telling my secrets to the lover of Madame de Tourvel.

I must let you know, however, that the little Volanges has already turned one head. Young Danceny is wild about her. He sings duets with her; and really, she sings better than a school-girl should. They must rehearse a good many duets, and I think that she takes nicely to the *unison*; but this Danceny is a child, who will waste his time in making love and will never finish. The little person, on her side, is shy enough; and in any event it will be much less amusing than you could have made it : wherefore I am in a bad humour and shall certainly quarrel with the Chevalier at his next appearance. I advise him to be gentle; for, at this moment, it would cost me nothing to break with him. I am sure that, if I had the sense to leave him at present, he would be in despair; and nothing amuses me so much as a lover's despair. He would call me perfidious, and that word " perfidious " has always pleased me; it is, after the word " cruel, " the sweetest to a woman's ear, and less difficult to deserve. . . . Seriously, I shall have to set about this rupture. There's what you are the cause of; so I put it on your conscience! Adieu. Recommend me to the prayers of your lady President.

Paris, 7th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SIXTH

### *The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil*

**T**HERE is never a woman then but abuses the empire she has known how to seize! And yourself, you whom I have so often dubbed my indulgent friend, you have discarded the title and are not afraid to attack me in the object of my affections! With what traits you venture to depict Madame de Tourvel!... What man but would have paid with his life for such insolent boldness? What woman other than yourself would have escaped without receiving at least an ungracious retort? In mercy, put me not to such tests; I will not answer for my power to sustain them. In the name of friendship, wait until I have had this woman, if you wish to revile her. Do you not know that pleasure alone has the right to remove the bandage from Love's eyes? But what am I saying? Has Madame de Tourvel any need of illusion? No; for to be adorable, she has only need to be herself. You reproach her with dressing badly; I quite agree : all adornment is hurtful to her, nothing that conceals her adorns. It is in the freedom of her *négligé* that she is really ravishing. Thanks to the distressing heat which we are experiencing, a *déshabillé* of simple stuff permits

me to see her round and supple figure. Only a piece of muslin covers her breast; and my furtive but penetrating gaze has already seized its enchanting form. Her face, say you, has no expression. And what should it express, in moments when nothing speaks to her heart? No, doubtless, she has not, like our coquettes, that false glance, which is sometimes seductive and always deceives. She knows not how to gloss over the emptiness of a phrase by a studied smile, and although she has the loveliest teeth in the world, she never laughs, except when she is amused. But you should see, in some frolicsome game, of what a frank and innocent gaiety she will present the image! Near some poor wretch whom she is eager to succour, what a pure joy and compassionate kindness her gaze denotes! You should see, above all, how, at the least word of praise or flattery, her heavenly face is tinged with the touching embarrassment of a modesty that is not feigned!... She is a prude and devout, and so you judge her to be cold and inanimate? I think very differently. What amazing sensibility she must have, that it can reach even her husband, and that she can always love a person who is always absent? What stronger proof would you desire? Yet I have been able to procure another.

I directed her walk in such a manner that a ditch had to be crossed; and, although she is very agile, she is even more timid. You can well believe how much a prude fears to *cross the ditch*! She was obliged to trust herself to me. I held this modest woman in my arms. Our preparations and the passage of my old aunt had caused the playful *dévoté* to peal with laughter; but when I had once taken hold of her, by a happy awkwardness our arms were interlaced. I pressed her breast against my own; and in this short interval, I felt her heart beat faster. An amiable flush suffused her face; and her modest embarrassment taught me well enough *that her heart had throbbed with love and not with fear*. My aunt, however, was deceived, as you are, and said, "The

child was frightened, " but the charming candour of *the child* did not permit her to lie, and she answered naively, " Oh no, but . . . " That alone was an illumination. From that moment the sweetness of hope has succeeded to my cruel uncertainty. I shall possess this woman; I shall steal her from the husband who profanes her: I will even dare ravish her from the God whom she adores. What delight, to be in turn the object and the victor of her remorse! Far be it from me to destroy the prejudices which sway her mind! They will add to my happiness and my triumph. Let her believe in virtue, and sacrifice it to me; let the idea of falling terrify her, without preventing her fall; and may she, shaken by a thousand terrors, forget them, vanquish them only in my arms. Then, I agree, let her say to me, " I adore thee;" she, alone among women, is worthy to pronounce these words. I shall be truly the God whom she has preferred.

Let us be candid : in our arrangements, as cold as they are facile, what we call happiness is hardly even a pleasure. Shall I tell you? I thought my heart was withered; and finding nothing left but my senses, I lamented my premature old age. Madame de Tourvel has restored to me the charming illusions of youth. With her I have no need of pleasure to be happy. The only thing which frightens me is the time which this adventure is going to take; for I dare leave nothing to chance. 'Tis in vain I recall my fortunate audacities; I cannot bring myself to put them in practice here. To become truly happy, I require her to give herself; and that is not a slight affair.

I am sure that you admire my prudence. I have not yet pronounced the word " love; " but we have already come to those of confidence and interest. To deceive her as little as possible, and above all to counteract the effect of stories which might come to her ears, I have myself told her, as though in self-accusation, of some of my most notorious traits. You would laugh to see the candour with which she lectures me. She wishes, she says, to

convert me. She has no suspicion as yet of what it will cost her to try. She is far from thinking, that *in pleading*, to use her own words, *for the unfortunates I have ruined*, she speaks in anticipation in her own cause. This idea struck me yesterday in the midst of one of her dissertations, and I could not resist the pleasure of interrupting her to tell her that she spoke like a prophet. Adieu, my fairest of friends. You see that I am not lost beyond all hope of return.

P. S. By the way, that poor Chevalier — has he killed himself from despair? Truly, you are a hundredfold naughtier person than myself, and you would humiliate me if I had any vanity.

At the Château de.... 9th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SEVENTH

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay.*

IF I have told you nothing about my marriage, it is because I know no more about it than I did the first day. I am accustoming myself to think no more of it, and I am quite satisfied with my manner of life. I study much at my singing and my harp; it seems to me that I like them better since I have no longer a master, or perhaps it is because I have a better one. M. le Chevalier Danceny, the gentleman of whom I told you, and with whom I sang at Madame de Merteuil's, is kind enough to come here every day, and to sing with me for whole hours. He is extremely amiable. He sings like an angel, and composes very pretty airs, to which he also does the words. It is a great pity that he is a Knight of Malta! It seems to me that, if he were to marry, his wife would be very happy. . . He has a charming gentleness. He never has the air of paying you a compliment, and yet everything he says flatters you. He takes me up constantly, now about my music, now about something else; but he mingles his criticisms with so much gaiety and interest, that it is impossible not to be grateful for them. If he only looks at you, it seems as though he

were saying something gracious. Added to all that, he is very obliging. For instance, yesterday he was invited to a great concert; he preferred to spend the whole evening at Mamma's. That pleased me very much; for, when he is not here, nobody talks to me, and I bore myself: whereas, when he is here, we sing and talk together. He and Madame de Merteuil are the only two persons I find amiable. But adieu, my dearest friend; I have promised to learn for to-day a little air with a very difficult accompaniment, and I would not break my word. I am going to practise it until he comes.

Paris, 7th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE EIGHTH

### *The Présidente de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges*

**N**o one, Madame, can be more sensible than I to the confidence you show in me, nor take a keener interest in the establishment of Mademoiselle de Volanges. It is, indeed, from my whole heart that I wish her a happiness of which I make no doubt she is worthy, and which your prudence will secure. I do not know M. le Comte de Gercourt; but being honoured by your choice, I cannot but form a favourable opinion of him. I confine myself, Madame, to wishing for this marriage a success as assured as my own, which is equally your handiwork, and for which each fresh day adds to my gratitude. May the happiness of your daughter be the reward of that which you have procured for me; and may the best of friends be also the happiest of mothers!

I am really grieved that I cannot offer you by word of mouth the homage of this sincere wish, nor make the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de Volanges so soon as I should wish. After having known your truly maternal kindness, I have a right to hope from her the tender friendship of a sister. I beg you, Madame, to be so good as to ask this from her in my behalf, while I wait until I have the opportunity of deserving it.



I expect to remain in the country all the time of M. de Tourvel's absence. I have taken advantage of this leisure to enjoy and profit by the society of the venerable Madame de Rosemonde. This lady is always charming; her great age has deprived her of nothing; she retains all her memory and sprightliness. Her body alone is eighty-four years old; her mind is only twenty.

Our seclusion is enlivened by her nephew, the Vicomte de Valmont, who has cared to devote a few days to us. I knew him only by his reputation, which gave me small desire to make his acquaintance; but he seems to me to be better than that. Here, where he is not spoilt by the hubbub of the world, he talks rationally with extraordinary ease, and excuses himself for his errors with rare candour. He speaks to me with much confidence, and I preach to him with great severity. You, who know him, will admit that it would be a fine conversion to make : but I suspect, in spite of his promises, that a week of Paris will make him forget all my sermons. His sojourn here will be at least so much saved from his ordinary course of conduct; and I think, from his fashion of life, that what he can best do is to do nothing at all. He knows that I am engaged in writing to you and has charged me to present you with his respectful homage. Pray accept my own also, with the goodness that I know in you; and never doubt the sincere sentiments with which I have the honour to be etc.

At the Château de . . . , 9th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE NINTH

*Madame de Volanges to the Présidente de Tourvel*

I HAVE never doubted, my fair and youthful friend, either of the kindness which you have for me, or of the sincere interest which you take in all that concerns me. It is not to elucidate that point, which I hope is settled between us, that I reply to your *reply*; but I cannot refrain from having a talk with you on the subject of the Vicomte de Valmont.

- I did not expect, I confess, ever to come across that name in your letters. Indeed, what can there be in common between you and him? You do not know this man; where should you have obtained any idea of the soul of a libertine? You speak to me of his *rare candour*: yes, indeed, the candour of Valmont must be most rare. Even more false and dangerous than he is amiable and seductive, never since his extreme youth has he taken a step or uttered a word without having some end in view which was either dishonourable or criminal. My dear, you know me; you know whether, of all the virtues which I try to acquire, charity be not the one which I cherish the most. So that, if Valmont were led away by vehemence of his passions; if, like a thousand others, he

of the country? If you were to spy upon his proceedings, I am sure you would discover that he only came there to have a more convenient shelter for some black deed he is contemplating in the neighbourhood. But, as it is impossible to remedy the evil, let us be content by ourselves avoiding it.

Farewell, my lovely friend; at present the marriage of my daughter is a little delayed. The Comte de Gercourt; whom we expected from day to day, tells me that his regiment is ordered to Corsica; and as military operations are still afoot, it will be impossible for him to absent himself before the winter. This vexes me; but it causes me to hope that we shall have the pleasure of seeing you at the wedding; and I was sorry that it was to have taken place without you. Adieu; I am, unreservedly and without compliment, entirely yours.

P.S. Recall me to the recollection of Madame de Rosemonde, whom I always love as dearly as she deserves.

Paris, 11 th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE TENTH

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont*

VICOMTE, are you angry with me? Or are you, indeed, dead? Or, what would not be unlike that, are you living only for your Présidente? This woman, who has restored you *the illusions of youth*, will soon restore you also its ridiculous prejudices. Here you are already timid and a slave; you might as well be amorous. You renounce *your fortunate audacities*. Behold you then conducting yourself without principles, and trusting all to hazard, or rather to caprice. Do you no longer remember that love, like medicine, is nothing but the *art of assisting nature*? You see that I beat you with your own arms, but I will not plume myself on that: it is indeed beating a man when he is down. *She must give herself*, you tell me. Ah, no doubt, she must; she will give herself like the others, with this difference, that it will be with a bad grace.

But if the end is that she should give herself, the true way is to begin by taking her. This absurd distinction is indeed a true sign of love's madness! I say love; for you are in love. To speak to you otherwise would be to cheat you, it would be to hide

tender he is! how excellently is he made for love! how well he knows how to feel intensely! It makes my head reel. Seriously, the perfect happiness which he derives from being loved by me gives me a real attachment for him.

The very same day upon which I wrote to you that I was going to promote a rupture, how happy I made him! Yet I was mightily occupied, when they announced him, about the means of putting him in despair. Was it reason or caprice: he never seemed to me so fine. I nevertheless received him with temper. He hoped to pass two hours with me, before the time when my door would be open to everybody. I told him that I was going out: he asked me whither I was going; I refused to tell him. He insisted; "Where I shall not have your company," I answered acidly. Luckily for himself, he stood as though petrified by this answer; for had he said a word, a scene would infallibly have ensued which would have led to the projected rupture. Astonished by his silence, I cast my eyes upon him, with no other intention, upon my oath, than to see what countenance he would shew. I discovered on that charming face that sorrow, at once so tender and so profound, to which, you yourself have admitted, it is so difficult to resist. Like causes produce like effects: I was vanquished a second time.

From that moment, I was only busy in finding a means of preventing him from having a grievance against me. "I am going out on business," said I, with a somewhat gentler air; "nay, even on business which concerns you; but do not question me further. I shall sup at home; return, and you shall know all." At this he recovered the power of speech; but I did not permit him to use it. "I am in great haste," I continued; "leave me, until this evening." He kissed my hand and went away.

Immediately, to compensate him, perhaps to compensate myself, I decide to acquaint him with my *petite maison*, of which he had no suspicion. I called my faithful Victoire. I have my head-ache;

I am gone to bed, for all my household; and left alone at last with my *Trusty*, whilst she disguises herself as a lackey, I don the costume of a waiting-maid. She next calls a hackney-coach to the gate of my garden, and behold us on our way! Arrived in this temple of love, I chose the most gallant of *déshabilles*. This one is delicious; it is my own invention : it lets nothing be seen and yet allows you to divine all. I promise you a pattern of it for your *Présidente*, when you have rendered her worthy to wear it.

After these preliminaries, whilst *Victoire* busies herself with other details, I read a chapter of *Le Sopha*, a letter of *Héloïse* and two Tales of *La Fontaine*, in order to rehearse the different tones which I would assume. Meantime, my Chevalier arrives at my door with his accustomed zeal. My porter denies him, and informs him that I am ill : incident the first. At the same time he hands him a note from me, but not in my hand-writing, after my prudent rule. He opens it and sees written therein in *Victoire's* hand : "At nine o'clock, punctually, on the Boulevard, in front of the *cafés*." Thither he betakes himself, and there a little lackey whom he does not know, whom he believes, at least, that he does not know, for of course it was *Victoire*, comes and informs him that he must dismiss his carriage and follow her. All this romantique promenade helped all the more to heat his mind, and a hot head is by no means undesirable. At last he arrives, and love and amazement produced in him a veritable enchantment. To give him time to recover, we strolled out for a while in the little wood; then I took him back again to the house. He sees, at first, two covers laid; then a bed prepared. We pass into the boudoir, which was richly adorned. There, half pensively, half in sentiment, I threw my arms round him, and fell on my knees.

"O my friend," said I, "in my desire to reserve the surprise of this moment for you, I reproach myself with having grieved you with a pretence of ill-humour; with having been able, for an

instant, to veil my heart to your gaze. Pardon me my wrongs : the strength of my love shall expiate them."

You may judge of the effect of this sentimental oration. The happy Chevalier lifted me up, and my pardon was sealed on that very same ottoman where you and I once sealed so gallantly, and in like fashion, our eternal rupture.

As we had six hours to pass together, and I had resolved to make all this time equally delicious for him, I moderated his transports, and brought an amiable coquetry to replace tenderness. I do not think that I have ever been at so great pains to please, nor that I have ever been so pleased with myself. After supper, by turns childish and reasonable, sensible and gay, even libertine at times, it was my pleasure to look upon him as a sultan in the heart of his seraglio, of which I was by turn the different favourites. In fact, his repeated acts of homage, although always received by the same woman, were ever received by a different mistress.

Finally, at the approach of day, we were obliged to separate ; and whatever he might say, or even do, to prove to me the contrary, he had as much need of separation as he had little desire of it. At the moment when we left the house, and for a last adieu, I took the key of this abode of bliss, and giving it into his hands : "I had it but for you," said I ; "it is right that you should be its master. It is for him who sacrifices to have the disposition of the temple." By such a piece of adroitness, I anticipated him from the reflexions which might have been suggested to him, by the possession, always suspicious, of a *petite maison*. I know him well enough to be sure that he will never make use of it except for me ; and if the whim seized me to go there without him, I have a second key. He would at all costs fix a day for return ; but I love him still too well, to care to exhaust him so soon. One must not permit one's self excesses, except with persons whom one wishes soon to leave. He does not know that himself ; but happily for him, I have knowledge for two.

I perceive that it is three o'clock in the morning, and that I have written a volume, with the intention but to write a word. Such is the charm of constant friendship: 'tis on account of that, that you are always he whom I love the best; but, in truth, the Chevalier pleases me more.

Paris, 12th August, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE ELEVENTH

*The Présidente de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges.*

**Y**OUR severe letter would have alarmed me, Madame, if happily I had not found here more causes for security than you give me for being afraid. This redoubtable M. de Valmont who must be the terror of every woman, seems to have laid down his murderous arms before coming to this *château*. Far from forming any projects there, he has not even advanced any pretensions ; and the quality of an amiable man, which even his enemies accord him, almost disappears here, to be superseded by that of frank good-nature.

It is apparently the country air which has brought about this miracle. What I can assure you is that, being constantly with me, even seeming to take pleasure in my company, he has not let fall one word which resembles love, not one of those phrases which all men permit themselves, without having, like him, what is required to justify them. He never compels one to that reserve which every woman who respects herself is forced to maintain nowadays, in order to repress the men who encircle her. He knows how not to abuse the gaiety which he inspires. He is perhaps somewhat of a flatterer ; but it is with so much delicacy,

that he would accustom modesty itself to praise. In short, if I had a brother, I should desire him to be such as M. de Valmont reveals himself here. Perhaps, many women would ask a more marked gallantry from him ; and I admit that I owe him infinite thanks for knowing how to judge me so well as not to confound me with them.

Doubtless, this portrait differs mightily from that which you send me : and in spite of that, neither need contradict the other, if one compares the dates. He confesses himself that he has committed many faults ; and some others will have been fathered on him. But I have met few men who spoke of virtuous women with greater respect, I might almost say enthusiasm. You teach me that at least in this matter he is no deceiver. His conduct towards Madame de Merteuil is a proof of this. He talks much to us of her, and it is always with so much praise, and with the air of so true an attachment, that I believed, until I received your letter, that what he called the friendship between the two was actually love. I reproach myself for this hasty judgment, wherein I was all the more wrong, in that he himself has often been at pains to justify her. I confess that I took for cunning what was honest sincerity on his part. I do not know, but it seems to me a man who is capable of so persistent a friendship for a woman so estimable cannot be a libertine beyond salvation. I am for the rest, ignorant as to whether we owe the quiet manner of life which he leads here to any projects he cherishes in the vicinity, as you assume. There are, indeed, certain amiable women near us, but he rarely goes abroad, except in the morning, and then he tells us that it is to shoot. It is true that he rarely brings back any game ; but he assures us that he is not a skilful sportsman. Moreover, what he may do without, causes me little anxiety ; and if I desired to know, it would only be in order to be convinced of your opinion or to bring you back to mine.

As to your suggestion to me to endeavour to cut short the stay

which M. de Valmont proposes to make here, it seems to me very difficult to dare to ask his aunt not to have her nephew in her house, the more so in that she is very fond of him. I promise you, however, but only out of deference and not for any need, to seize any opportunity of making this request, either to her or to himself. As for myself, M. de Tourvel is aware of my project of remaining here until his return, and he would be astonished, and rightly so, at my frivolity, were I to change my mind.

These, Madame, are my very lengthy explanations : but I thought I owed it to truth to bear my testimony in M. de Valmont's favour ; it seems to me he stood in great need of it with you. I am none the less sensible of the friendship which dictated your counsels. To that also I am indebted for your obliging remarks to me on the occasion of the delay as to your daughter's marriage. I thank you for them most sincerely : but however great the pleasure which I promise myself in passing those moments with you, I would sacrifice them with a good will to my desire to know Mlle. de Volanges more speedily happy, if, indeed, she could ever be more so than with a mother so deserving of all her affection and respect. I share with her those two sentiments which attach me to you, and I pray you kindly to receive my assurance of them.

I have the honour to be, etc.

At the Château de . . . , 13th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE TWELFTH

*Cécile Volanges to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

MAMMA is indisposed, Madame; she cannot leave the house, and I must keep her company: I shall not, therefore, have the honour of accompanying you to the Opera. I assure you that I do not regret the performance nearly so much as not to be with you. I pray that you will be convinced of this. I love you so much! Would you kindly tell M. le Chevalier Danceny that I have not the selection of which he spoke to me, and that if he can bring it to me to-morrow, it will give me great pleasure? If he comes to-day, he will be told that we are not at home; but that is because Mamma cannot receive anybody I hope that she will be better to-morrow.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Paris, 13th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE THIRTEENTH

*The Marquise de Merteuil to Cécile Volanges.*

I AM most grieved, my pretty one, both at being deprived of the pleasure of seeing you, and at the cause of this privation. I hope that the opportunity will recur. I will acquit myself of your commission with the Chevalier Danceny, who will certainly be distressed to hear of your Mamma's sickness. If she can receive me to-morrow, I will come and keep her company. She and I will assault the Chevalier de Belleruche at piquet, and while we win his money, we shall have the additional pleasure of hearing you sing with your amiable master, to whom I will suggest it. If this is convenient to your Mamma and to you, I can answer for myself and my two cavaliers. Adieu, my pretty one; my compliments to dear Madame de Volanges. I kiss you most tenderly.

Paris, 13th August, 1777.

## LETTER THE FOURTEENTH

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay.*

I did not write to you yesterday, my dear Sophie, but it was not pleasure which was the cause; of that I can assure you. Mamma was ill, and I did not leave her all day. In the evening, when I retired, I had no heart for anything at all, and I went to bed very quickly, to make sure that the day was done; never have I passed a longer. It is not that I do not love Mamma dearly; but I do not know what it was. I was to have gone to the Opera with Madame de Merteuil; the Chevalier Danceny was to have been there. You know well that they are the two persons whom I like best. When the hour arrived when I should have been there, my heart was sore in spite of me. I did not care for anything, and I cried, and cried, without being able to stop myself. Happily Mamma had gone to bed, and could not see me. I am quite sure that the Chevalier Danceny will have been sorry too, but he will have been amused by the spectacle, and by everybody; that's very different.

Luckily, Mamma is better to-day, and Madame de Merteuil is coming with somebody else and the Chevalier Danceny; but she always comes very late, Madame de Merteuil; and when one is so long all by one's self, it is very tiresome. It is not yet

eleven o'clock. It is true that I must play on my harp; and then my toilette will take me some time, for I want my hair to be done nicely to-day. I think Mother Perpétue is right and that one becomes a coquette as soon as one enters the world. I have never had such a desire to look pretty as during the last few days, and I find I am not as much so as I thought; and then, by the side of women who use rouge, one loses much. Madame de Merteuil, for instance; I can see that all the men think her prettier than me: that does not vex me much, because she is so fond of me; and then she assures me that the Chevalier Danceny thinks I am prettier than she. It is very nice of her to have told me that! She even seemed to be pleased at it. Well, that's a thing I can't understand! It's because she likes me so much! And he!.... Oh, that gives me so much pleasure! I think too that only to look at him is enough to make one prettier? I should look at him always, if I did not fear to meet his eyes: for every time that that happens to me, it puts me out of countenance, and seems as though it hurt me; but no matter!

Adieu, my dear friend: I am going to make my toilette, I love you as dearly as ever.

Paris, 14th August, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE FIFTEENTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

**I**T is very nice of you not to abandon me to my sad fate. The life I lead here is really fatiguing, from the excess of its repose and its insipid monotony. Reading your letter and the details of your charming day, I was tempted a score of times to invent some business, to fly to your feet, and beg of you an infidelity, in my favour, to your Chevalier, who, after all, does not merit his happiness. Do you know that you have made me jealous of him? Why talk to me of an eternal rupture? I abjure that vow, uttered in a moment of frenzy: we should not have been worthy to make it, had we meant to keep it. Ah, that I might one day avenge myself, in your arms, for the involuntary vexation which the happiness of your Chevalier has caused me! I am indignant, I confess, when I think that this man, without reasoning, without giving himself the least trouble, but quite stupidly following the instinct of his heart, should find a felicity to which I cannot attain. O I will trouble it!.... Promise me that I shall trouble it. You yourself, are you not humiliated? You take the trouble to deceive him, and he is happier than you. You believe he is in your chains! It is, indeed, you, who are in his. He sleeps tranquilly, whilst



you watch over his pleasures. What more would his slave do?

Listen, my lovely friend: so long as you divide yourself among many, I have not the least jealousy: I see then in your lovers only the successors of Alexander, incapable of preserving amongst them all that empire over which I reigned alone. But that you should give yourself entirely to one of them! That another man should exist as fortunate as myself! I will not suffer it; do not hope that I shall suffer it. Either take me back, or, at least, take someone else; and do not betray, by an exclusive caprice, the inviolate bond of friendship which we have sworn.

It is quite enough, no doubt, that I should have to complain of love. You see, I lend myself to your ideas, and confess my errors. In fact, if to be in love is to be unable to live without possessing the object of one's desire, to sacrifice to it one's time, one's pleasures, one's life, I am very really in love. I am no more advanced for that. I should not even have anything at all to tell you of in this matter, but for an incident which gives me much food for reflexion, and as to which I know not yet whether I must hope or fear.

You know my *chasseur*, a treasure of intrigue, and a real valet of comedy: you can imagine that his instructions bade him to fall in love with the waiting-maid, and make the household drunk. The knave is more fortunate than I: he has already succeeded. He has just discovered that Madame de Tourvel has charged one of her people to inform himself as to my behaviour, and even to follow me in my morning expeditions, as far as he could without being observed. What is this woman's pretension? Thus then the most modest of them all yet dares do things which we should hardly venture to permit ourselves. I swear....! But before I think of avenging myself for this feminine ruse, let us occupy ourselves over methods of turning it to our advantage. Hitherto, these excursions which are suspected have had no object; needs must I give them one. This deserves all my attention, and I take leave of you to ponder upon it. Farewell, my lovely friend.

Still at the Château de..., 15th August, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE SIXTEENTH

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay.*

**A**<sup>H</sup>, my Sophie, I have a heap of news! I ought not, perhaps, to tell you: but I must talk to someone; it is stronger than I! This Chevalier Danceny... I am so perturbed that I can hardly write: I do not know where to begin. Ever since I related to you the sweet evening which I passed at Mamma's, with him and Madame de Merteuil, I have said no more about him to you: it is because I did not want to speak of him to anybody; but I was thinking of him constantly. Since then he has grown so sad—oh, sad! sad!—that it gave me pain; and when I asked him why, he answered that it was not so; but I could well see that it was. Finally, yesterday he was even sadder than ordinarily. This did not prevent him from having the kindness to sing with me as usual; but every time that he looked at me it gripped my heart. When we had finished singing, he went to shut up my harp in its case; and returning the key to me, begged me to play again that evening when I was alone. I had no suspicion of anything at all; I did not even want to play: but he begged me so earnestly that I told him yes. He, certainly, had his motive. In effect, when I had retired to my room and my waiting-maid had gone, I went to get

my harp. In the strings I found a letter, simply folded, with no seal, and it was from him. Ah, if you knew all he asks of me! Since I have read his letter, I feel so much delight that I can think of nothing else. I read it four times straight off, and then shut it up in my desk. I knew it by heart; and, when I was in bed, I repeated it so often that I had no thought to sleep. As soon as I shut my eyes, I saw him there; he told me himself all that I had just read. I did not get to sleep till quite late; and, as soon as I was awake (it was still quite early), I went to get his letter and read it again at my ease. I carried it to bed with me, and then I kissed it as if.... Perhaps I did wrong to kiss a letter like that, but I could not check myself.

At present, my dear friend, if I am very happy, I am also much embarrassed; for assuredly, I ought not to reply to this letter. I know that I should not, and yet he asks me to; and, if I do not reply, I am sure he will be sad again. All the same, it is very unfortunate for him! What do you advise me to do? But you can no more tell than I. I have a great desire to speak of it to Madame de Merteuil, who is so fond of me. I should indeed like to console him; but I should not like to do anything wrong. We are always recommended to cherish a kind heart! and then they forbid us to follow its inspiration, directly there is question of a man! That is not just either. Is not a man our neighbour as a woman, if not more so? For, after all, has not one one's father as well as one's mother, one's brother as well as one's sister? The husband is still something extra. Nevertheless, if I were to do something which was not right, perhaps M. Danceny himself would no longer have a good opinion of me! Oh, rather than that, I would sooner see him sad; and then, besides, I shall always have time enough. Because he wrote yesterday, I am not obliged to write to-day: I shall be sure to see Madame de Merteuil this evening, and, if I have the courage, I will tell her all. If I only do what she tells me, I shall have nothing to reproach myself with.

And then, perhaps, she will tell me that I may answer him *a little*, so that he need not be so sad ! Oh, I am in great trouble !

Farewell, my dear friend ; tell me, all the same, what you think.

Paris, 19th August, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE SEVENTEENTH

*The Chevalier Danceny to Cécile Volanges.*

**B**EFORE succumbing, Mademoiselle, to the pleasure, or, shall I say, the necessity of writing to you, I commence by imploring you to hear me. I feel that, to be bold enough to declare my sentiments, I have need of indulgence; did I but wish to justify them, it would be useless to me. What am I about to do, after all, save to show you your handiwork? And what have I to tell you, that my eyes, my embarrassment, my conduct and even my silence have not told you already? And why should you take offence at a sentiment to which you have given birth? Emanating from you, it is worthy to be offered to you; if it is ardent as my soul, it is pure as your own. Shall it be a crime to have known how to appreciate your charming face, your seductive talents, your enchanting graces, and that touching candour which adds inestimable value to qualities already so precious? No, without a doubt; but without being guilty, one may be unhappy; and that is the fate which awaits me if you refuse to accept my homage. It is the first that my heart has offered. But for you, I should have been, not happy, but tranquil. I have seen you, repose has fled far away from me, and my happiness is insecure. Yet you are surprised

at my sadness; you ask me its cause: sometimes, I have even thought to see that it affected you. Ah, speak but a word and my felicity will be your handiwork! But, before you pronounce it, remember that one word can also fill the cup of my misery. Be then the arbiter of my destiny. Through you I am to be eternally happy or wretched. In what dearer hands can I commit an interest of such importance?

I shall end as I have begun, by imploring your indulgence. I have begged you to hear me; I will dare more, I will pray you to reply to me. A refusal would lead me to think that you were offended and my heart is a witness that my respect is equal to my love.

P.S. You can make use, to send a reply, of the same method which I employed to bring this letter into your hands; it seems to me as convenient as it is secure.

Paris, 18th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE EIGHTEENTH

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay.*

**W**HAT, Sophie! You blame me in advance for what I am about to do! I had already enough anxiety, and here you are increasing it. Clearly, you say, I ought not to answer. You speak with great confidence; and besides, you do not know exactly how things are; you are not here to see. I am sure that, were you in my place, you would act like me. Assuredly, as a general rule, one ought not to reply; and you can see from my letter of yesterday that I did not want to either: but the thing is, I do not think anyone has ever found herself in quite my case.

And still to be obliged to take my decision all unaided! Madame de Merteuil, whom I counted on seeing yesterday evening, did not come. Everything conspires against me; it is through her that I know him! It is almost always with her that I have seen him, that I have spoken to him. It is not that I have any grudge against her; but she leaves me just in the embarrassing moment. Oh, I am greatly to be pitied!

Imagine! He came here yesterday just as he used to. I was so confused that I dared not look at him. He could not speak to me, because Mamma was there. I quite expected that he would be





grieved, when he should find that I had not written to him. I did not know what face to wear. A moment later he asked me if I should like him to bring me my harp. My heart beat so quick, that it was as much as I could do to answer yes. When he came back, it was even worse. I only looked at him for a second. He—he did not look at me, but he had such a look that one would have thought him ill. It made me very unhappy. He began to tune my harp, and afterwards, coming close to me, he said, “Ah, Mademoiselle!” . . . . He only said these two words; but it was with such an accent that I was quite overwhelmed. I struck the first chords on my harp without knowing what I was doing. Mamma asked me if we were not going to sing. He excused himself, saying that he was not feeling well, and I, who had no excuse—I had to sing. I could have wished that I had never had a voice. I chose purposely an air which I did not know; for I was quite sure that I could not sing anything, and was afraid that something would be noticed. Luckily, there came a visit, and as soon as I heard the carriage wheels, I stopped, and begged him to take away my harp. I was very much afraid lest he should leave at the same time; but he came back.

Whilst Mamma and the lady who had arrived were talking together, I wanted to look at him again for one instant. I met his eyes, and it was impossible for me to turn away my own. A moment later, I saw the tears rise, and he was obliged to turn away in order not to be observed. For an instant I could no longer hold myself in; I felt that I too should weep. I went out, and at once wrote in pencil, on a scrap of paper: “Do not be so sad, I implore you; I promise to give you a reply.” Surely, you cannot see any harm in that, and then it was stronger than I. I put my paper in the strings of my harp, where his letter had been, and returned to the *salon*. I felt more calm.

It seemed to me very long until the lady went away. Luckily, she had more visits to pay; she went away shortly afterwards. As

soon as she was gone, I said that I wanted to have my harp again, and begged him to go and fetch it. I saw from his expression that he suspected nothing. But, on his return, oh, how pleased he was! As he set down my harp in front of me, he placed himself in such a position that Mamma could not see, and he took my hand, which he squeezed . . . but, in such a way! . . . it was only for a moment: but I could not tell you the pleasure which it gave me. However, I withdrew it; so I have nothing for which to reproach myself.

And now, my dear friend, you must see that I cannot abstain from writing to him, since I have given my promise; and then I am not going to give him any more pain; for I suffer more than he does. If it were a question of doing anything wrong. I should certainly not do it. But what harm can there be in writing, especially when it is to save somebody from being unhappy? What embarrasses me is that I do not know how to write my letter: but he will surely feel that it is not my fault; and then I am certain that as long as it only comes from me, it will give him pleasure.

Adieu, my dear friend. If you think that I am wrong, tell me; but I do not think so. The nearer the moment of writing to him comes, the more does my heart beat: more than you can conceive. I must do it, however, since I have promised. Adieu.

Paris, 17th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE NINETEENTH

*Cécile Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny.*

**Y**ou were so sad yesterday, Monsieur, and that made me so sorry, that I went so far as to promise to reply to the letter which you wrote me. I none the less feel to-day that I ought not to do this: however, as I have promised, I do not wish to break my word, and that must prove how much friendship I feel for you. Now that you know that, I hope you will not ask me to write to you again. I hope also that you will tell nobody that I have written to you, because I should be certainly blamed, and that might cause me a great deal of pain. I hope, above all, that you yourself will not form a bad opinion of me, which would grieve me more than anything. I can give you every assurance that I would not have done as much to anyone except yourself. I should be very glad if you would do me a favour in your turn, and be less sad than you were; it takes away all the pleasure that I feel in seeing you. You see, Monsieur, I speak to you very sincerely.. I ask nothing better than that I may always keep your friendship; but I beg of you do not write to me again.

I have the honour to be,

CÉCILE VOLANGES.

Paris, 20th August, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE TWENTIETH

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont*

Ah, wretch, so you flatter me, for fear that I shall make a mock of you! Come, I pardon you : you write me such a heap of nonsense that I must even forgive you the virtue in which you are kept by your Présidente, I do not think my Chevalier would show as much indulgence as I do ; he would not be the man to approve the renewal of our contract, or to find anything amusing in your mad idea. I have laughed mightily over it, however, and was really vexed that I had to laugh over it by myself. If you had been there, I know not whither this merriment might not have led us ; but I have had time for reflexion, and am armed with severity. I do not say that I refuse for ever ; but I postpone, and I am right to do so. I should bring my vanity with me, and once wounded at the game, one knows not where one stops. I should be the woman to enslave you again, to make you forget your Présidente ; and if I—unworthy I—were to disgust you with virtue, consider the scandal ! To avoid these dangers, here are my conditions :

As soon as you have had your lovely bigot, as soon as you can furnish me with the proof, come to me and I am yours. But you cannot be ignorant that, in affairs of importance, only written proofs

are admitted. By this arrangement, on one part, I shall become a recompense instead of being a consolation, and that notion likes me better : on the other hand, your success will have added piquancy by being itself a means to an infidelity. Come then, come as soon as possible, and bring me the gage of your triumph ; like those valiant knights of ours, who came to lay at their ladies' feet the brilliant fruits of their victory. Seriously, I am curious to know what a prude can write after such a moment, and what veil she casts over her language, after having discarded any from her person. It is for you to say whether I price myself too high ; but I forewarn you that there is no abatement. Till then, my dear Vicomte, you will find it good that I remain faithful to my Chevalier and amuse myself by making him happy, in spite of the slight annoyance this may cause you.

However, if my morals were less severe, I think you would have, at this moment, a dangerous rival : the little Volanges girl. I am bewitched by this child : it is a real passion. Unless I be deceived, she will become one of our most fashionable women. I see her little heart developing, and it is a ravishing spectacle. She already loves her Danceny with ardour ; but she knows nothing about it yet. He himself, although greatly in love, has still the timidity of his age, and dares not as yet tell her too much about it. The two of them are united in adoring me. The little one especially has a mighty desire to confide her secret to me. A few days ago, particularly, I saw her really oppressed, and should have done her a great service by assisting her a little : but I do not forget that she is a child, and I should not like to compromise myself. Danceny has spoken to me somewhat more clearly ; but with him my course is resolved ; I refuse to hear him. As to the little one, I am often tempted to make her my pupil ; it is a service that I would fain render Gercourt. He leaves me the time, since he is to stay in Corsica until the month of October. I have a notion to make use of that time, and that we will give him a fully formed woman,

instead of his innocent school-girl. In effect, what must be the insolent sense of security of this man, that he dare sleep in comfort, whilst a woman who has to complain of him has not yet been avenged? Believe me, if the child were here at this moment, I do not know what I would not say to her.

Adieu, Vicomte; good-night, and success to you: but do, for God's sake, make progress. Bethink you that, if you do not have this woman, the others will blush for having taken you.

Paris, 20th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

At last, my lovely friend, I have taken a step forward : a really great step, and one which, if it has not taken me to my goal, has at least let me know that I am on the right road, and dispelled the fear I was in, that I was lost. I have at last declared my love ; and although the most obstinate silence had been maintained, I have obtained a reply that is, perhaps, the least equivocal and the most flattering : but let us not anticipate events, let us begin further back.

You will remember that a watch was set upon my movements. Well, I resolved that his scandalous means should turn to public edification ; and this is what I did. I charged my confidant with the task of finding me some poor wretch in the neighbourhood who was in need of succour. This commission was not difficult to fulfil. Yesterday afternoon, he gave me the information that they were going to seize to-day, in the morning, the goods of a whole family who could not pay their taxes. I assured myself that there was no girl or woman amongst this household whose age or face might render my action suspicious ; and, when I was well informed, I declared at supper my intention of going after game in the morning. Here I must render justice to my Président ; doubtless

she felt a certain remorse at the orders which she had given ; and, not having the strength to vanquish her curiosity, she had at least enough to oppose my desire. It was going to be excessively hot ; I ran the risk of making myself ill ; I should kill nothing, and fire myself to no purpose ; and during all this dialogue, her eyes, which spoke, perhaps, better than she wished, let me see quite sufficiently that she desired me to take these bad reasons for good. I was careful not to surrender, as you may believe, and I even resisted a little diatribe against sportsmen and sport and a little cloud of ill-humour which obscured, during all the evening, that celestial brow. I feared for a moment that her orders had been revoked, and that her delicacy might hinder me. I did not calculate on the strength of a woman's curiosity ; and so was deceived. My *chasseur* reassured me the same evening, and I went satisfied to bed.

At daybreak I rose and started off. Barely fifty yards from the *château*, I perceived the spy who was to follow me. I started after the game, and walked across country to the village whither I wished to make, with no other pleasure on the road than to give a run to the rogue who followed me, and who, not daring to quit the road, often had to cover, at full speed, a three times greater distance than mine. By dint of exercising him, I was excessively hot myself, and I sat down at the foot of a tree. He had the insolence to steal behind a bush, not twenty paces from me, and to sit down as well ! I was tempted for a moment to fire my gun at him, which, although it only contained small shot, would have given him a sufficient lesson as to the dangers of curiosity : luckily for him, I rembered that he was useful and even necessary to my projects ; this reflexion saved him.

However, I reach the village ; I see the commotion ; I step forward ; I question somebody ; the facts are related. I have the collector called to me ; and, yielding to my generous compassion, I pay nobly fifty-six livres, for lack of which five persons were to be left to straw and their despair. After this simple action, you



cannot imagine what a crowd of benedictions echoed round me from the witnesses of the scene! What tears of gratitude poured from the eyes of the aged head of the family, and embellished his patriarchal face, which, a moment before, had been rendered really hideous by the savage marks of despair! I was watching this spectacle, when another peasant, younger, who led a woman and two children by the hands, advanced to me with hasty steps and said to them. "Let us all fall at the feet of this image of God;" and at the same instant I was surrounded by the family, prostrate at my knees. I will confess my weakness: my eyes were moistened by tears, and I felt an involuntary but delicious emotion. I am astonished at the pleasure one experiences in doing good; and I should be tempted to believe that what we call virtuous people have not so much merit as they lead us to suppose. However that may be, I found it just to pay these poor people for the pleasure which they had given me. I had brought ten louis with me, and I gave them these. The acknowledgments began again, but they were not pathetic to the same degree: necessity had produced the great, the true effect; the rest was but a simple expression of gratitude and astonishment at superfluous gifts.

However, in the midst of the loquacious benedictions of this family, I was by no means unlike the hero of a drama, in the scene of the *dénouement*. Above all, you will remark the faithful spy was also in this crowd. My purpose was fulfilled: I disengaged myself from them all, and regained the *château*. On further consideration, I congratulated myself on my inventive genius. This woman is, doubtless, well worth all the pains I take; they will one day be my titles with her; and having, in some sort, as it were, paid in advance, I shall have the right to dispose of her, according to my fantasy, without having any cause to reproach myself.

I forgot to tell you that, to turn everything to profit, I asked these good people to pray for the success of my projects. You shall see whether their prayers have not been already in part

hearkened to... But they come to tell me that supper is ready, and it would be too late to dispatch this letter, if I waited to end it after rising from table. "To be continued," therefore, "in our next." I am sorry, for the sequel is the finest part. Adieu, my lovely friend. You steal from me a moment of the pleasure of seeing her.

At the Château de..., 20th August, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

### *The Présidente de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges*

**Y**ou will, doubtless, be well pleased, Madame, to hear of a trait in M. de Valmont which is in great contrast to all those under which you have represented him to me. It is so painful to have to think unfavourably of anybody, so grievous to find only vices in people who should possess all the qualities necessary to make virtue lovable! Moreover, you love so well to be indulgent that, were it only to oblige you, I must give you a reason for reconsidering your too harsh judgment. M. de Valmont seems to me entitled to hope for this favour, I might almost say this justice; and this is on what I base my opinion.

This morning he made one of those excursions which might lead one to believe in some project on his part, in the vicinity, just as the idea came to you of one; an idea which I accuse myself of having entertained with too much precipitation. Luckily for him, and above all luckily for us, since we are thus saved from being unjust, one of my wren happened to be going in the same direction and it is from this source that my reprehensible but fortunate curiosity was satisfied. He related to us that M. de Valmont, having found an unfortunate family in the village of-whose goods were being

sold because they were unable to pay their taxes, not only hastened to pay the debt of these poor people, but even added to this gift a considerable sum of money. My servant was a witness of this virtuous action; and he related to me in addition that the peasants, talking amongst themselves and with him, had said that a servant, whom they described, and who is believed by mine to be that of M. de Valmont, had sought information yesterday as to any of the inhabitants of the village who might be in need of help. It that be so, it was not merely a passing feeling of compassion, suggested by the opportunity; it was the deliberate project of doing good; it was a search for the chance of being benevolent; it was the fairest virtue of the most noble souls: but be it chance or design, it is none the less a laudable and generous action, the mere recital of which moved me to tears. I will add more, and still from a sense of justice, that when I spoke to him of this action, which he had never mentioned, he began by excusing himself, and had the air of attaching so little importance to it, that the merit of it was enhanced by his modesty.

After that, tell me, my esteemed friend, if M. de Valmont is indeed an irreclaimable libertine? If he can be no more than that and yet behave so, what is left for honest folk? What! are the wicked to share with the good the sacred joy of charity? Would God permit that a virtuous family should receive from the hands of a villain, succour for which they render thanks to Divine Providence, and could it please Him to hear pure lips bestow their blessings upon a reprobate? No! I prefer to hold that errors, long as they may have lasted, do not endure for ever; and I cannot think that he who does good can be the enemy of virtue. M. de Valmont is perhaps only one more instance of the danger of associations. I remain of this opinion which pleases me. If, on one side, it may serve to justify him in your opinion, on the other, it renders more and more precious to me the tender friendship which unites me to you for life.

I have the honour to be, etc.

P. S. Madame de Rosemonde and I are going this moment to see for ourselves this worthy and unfortunate family, and to unite our tardy aid to that of M. de Valmont. We shall take him with us. We shall at least give these good people the pleasure of seeing their benefactor: that is, I believe, all he has left for us to do.

At the Château de... , 20th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER, THE TWENTY-THIRD

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

I LEFT off at my return to the *château*; I resume my tale. I had only time to make a hurried toilette, ere I repaired to the drawing-room, where my beauty was working at her tapestry, whilst the *curé* of the place was reading the gazette to my old aunt. I went and took my seat by the frame. Glances sweeter than were customary, and almost caressing, enabled me soon to divine that the servant had already given an account of his mission. Indeed, the dear, inquisitive lady could no longer keep the secret which she had acquired; and without fear of interrupting a venerable pastor, whose recital indeed resembled a sermon: "I too have a piece of news to recite," said she; and suddenly related my adventure, with an exactitude which did honour to the intelligence of her historian. You may conceive what play I made with my modesty: but who can stop a woman, when she praises the man whom, without knowing it, she loves? I decided therefore to let her have her head. One would have thought she was making the panegyric of a saint. All this time I was observing, not without hope, all the promises of love in her animated gaze; her gesture, which had become more lively; and, above all, her voice, which, by its

already perceptible alteration, betrayed the emotion of her soul. She had hardly finished speaking when; "Come, my nephew," said Madame de Rosemonde to me, "come and let me embrace you." I felt at once that the pretty preacher could not prevent herself from being embraced in her turn. However, she wished to fly; but she was soon in my arms, and, so far from having the strength to resist, she had scarcely sufficient to maintain herself. The more I observe this woman, the more desirable she appears to me. She hastened to return to her frame, and to everybody had the appearance of resuming her tapestry. But I saw well that her trembling hand prevented her from continuing her work.

After dinner, the ladies insisted on going to see the unfortunates whom I had so piously succoured; I accompanied them. I spare you the tedium of this second scene of gratitude and praise. My heart, impelled by a delicious recollection, hurries on the moment for return to the *château*. On the way, my fair Présidente, more pensive than is her wont, said never a word. Occupied as I was in seeking the means of profiting by the effect which the episode of the day had produced, I maintained the same silence. Madame de Rosemonde was the only one to speak, and obtained from us but scant and few replies. We must have bored her; that was my intention, and it succeeded. Thus, on stepping from the carriage, she passed into her apartment and left my fair one and myself *tête-à-tête*, in a dimly lighted-room—a sweet obscurity which emboldens timid love.

I had not to be at the pains to lead the conversation into the channel which I wished. The fervour of the amiable preacheress served me better than any skill of my own.

"When one is capable of doing good," said she, letting her sweet gaze rest on me, "how can one pass one's life in doing ill?"

"I do not deserve, either that praise or that censure," said I, "and I cannot imagine how you, who have so clear a wit, have not yet divined me. Though my confidence may damage me in your

eyes, you are far too worthy of it that I should be able to refuse it. You will find the key to my conduct in my character, which is unhappily far too easy-going. Surrounded by persons of no morality, I have imitated their vices; I have perhaps made it a point of vanity to surpass them. In the same way, attracted here by the example of virtue, without ever hoping to come up to you, I have, at least, endeavoured to imitate you. Ah, perhaps the action for which you praise me to-day would lose all value in your eyes if you knew its true motive!" (You see, my fair friend, how near the truth I touched.) "It is not to myself," I went on, "that these unfortunates owe their rescue. Where you think you see a praiseworthy action, I did but seek a means to please. I was nothing else, since I must say it, but the weak agent of the divinity whom I adore." (Here she would have interrupted me, but I did not give her time.) "At this very moment even," I added, "my secret only escapes from my weakness. I had vowed that I would be silent before you; I made it my happiness to render to your virtues as much as to your charms a pure homage of which you should always remain ignorant; but incapable of deception, when I have before my eyes the example of candour, I shall not have to reproach myself to you with guilty dissimulation. Do not believe that I insult you by entertaining any criminal hope. I shall be miserable, I know; but my sufferings will be dear to me: they will prove to me the immensity of my love; it is at your feet, it is on your bosom that I will cast down my woes. There shall I draw the strength to suffer anew; there shall I find compassionate bounty, and I shall deem myself consoled because you will have pitied me. Oh, you whom I adore! hearken to me, pity me, succour me!"

By this time I was at her feet, and I pressed her hands in mine; but she suddenly disengaged them and, folding them over her eyes, cried with an expression of despair, "Oh, wretched me!" then burst into tears. Luckily I was exalted to such a degree that I also wept; and, seizing her hands again, I bathed them with my tears.



This precaution was most necessary; for she was so full of her grief that she would not have perceived my own, had I not taken this means of informing her. I moreover gained the privilege of considering at my leisure that charming face, yet more embellished by the potent charm of her tears. My head grew hot, and so little was I master of myself that I was tempted to profit by that moment.

What is this weakness of ours? of what avail is the force of circumstances if, forgetting my own projects, I risked losing, by a premature triumph, the charms of a long battle and the details of a painful defeat; if seduced by the desires of youth, I thought of exposing the conqueror of Madame de Tourvel to the pain of plucking, for the fruit of victory, but the insipid consolation of having had one woman more? Ah, let her surrender, but let her first fight; let her, without having strength to conquer, have enough to resist; let her relish at her leisure the sentiment of her weakness and be constrained to confess her defeat! Let us leave it to the obscure poacher to kill at a bound the stag he has surprised; your true hunter will give it a run. Is not this project of mine sublime? Yet perhaps I should be now regretting that I had not followed it, had not chance come to the rescue of my prudence.

We heard a noise. Someone was coming to the drawing-room. Madame de Tourvel, in alarm, rose precipitately, seized one of the candles, and left the room. I could not but let her go. It was only one of the servants. As soon as I was assured of this, I followed her. I had hardly gone a few paces, before, whether that she had recognized me, or for some vague sentiment of terror, she quickened her steps, and flung herself into, rather than entered, her chamber, the door of which she closed behind her. I went after her; but the door was locked inside. I was careful not to knock; that would have been to give her the chance of a too easy resistance. I had the good and simple idea of peeping through the key-hole, and I saw this adorable woman on her knees, bathed with tears, and fervently praying. What God did she dare invoke? Is there one potent

enough to resist love? In vain, hence-forward, will she invoke extraneous aid! 'Tis I who will order her destiny.

Thinking I had done enough for one day, I too withdrew to my own room, and started to write to you. I hoped to see her again at supper; but she had given out that she was indisposed, and had gone to bed. Madame de Rosemonde wished to go up to her; but the cunning invalid alleged a headache which prevented her from seeing anybody. You may guess that after supper the interval was short, and that I too had my headache. Withdrawing to my room, I wrote a long letter to complain of this severity, and went to bed with the intention of delivering it to her this morning. I slept badly, as you can see by the date of this letter. I rose and re-read my epistle. I discovered that I had not been sufficiently restrained, had exhibited less love than ardour. It must be written again, but in a calmer mood.

I see the day break, and I hope the freshness which accompanies it will bring me sleep. I am going to return to my bed; and, whatever may be the power of this woman over me, I promise you never to be so occupied with her as to lack time to think much of you. Adieu, my lovely friend!

At the Château de . . . , 21st August, 17<sup>th</sup>,  
at four o'clock in the morning.

## LETTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel.*

**A**n, Madame, deign in pity to calm the trouble of my soul, deign to tell me what I am to hope or fear. Cast between the extremes of happiness and misfortune, uncertainty is a cruel torment. Why did I speak to you? Why did I not know how to resist the imperious charm which betrayed my thoughts to you? Content to adore you in silence, I had at least the consolation of my love; and this pure sentiment, untroubled then by the image of your grief, sufficed for my felicity; but that source of happiness has become my despair, since I saw your tears flow, since I heard that cruel *Ah, wretched me!*

Madame, those words will echo long within my heart. By what fatality can the sweetest of the sentiments inspire nothing but terror? What then is this fear? Ah, it is not that of reciprocation: your heart, which I have misunderstood, is not made for love; mine, which you calumniate unceasingly is the only one which is disturbed; yours is even pitiless. If it were not so, you would not have refused a word of consolation to the wretch who told you of his sufferings; you would not have withdrawn yourself from his sight, when he has no other pleasure than that of seeing you; you

would not have played a cruel game with his anxiety by letting him be told that you were ill, without permitting him to go and inform himself of your health; you would have felt that the same night which did but mean for you twelve hours of repose would be for him a century of pain.

For what cause, tell me, have I deserved this intolerable severity? I do not fear to take you for my judge: what have I done, then, but yield to an involuntary sentiment, inspired by beauty and justified by virtue, always restrained by respect, the innocent avowal of which was the effect of trust and not of hope? Will you betray that trust, which you yourself seemed to permit me, and to which I yielded myself without reserve? No I cannot believe that: it would be to imply a fault in you, and my heart revolts at the bare idea of detecting one. I withdraw my reproaches; write them I can, but think them never! Ah, let me believe you perfect; it is the one pleasure which is left me! Prove to me that you are so by granting me your generous aid. What poor wretch have you ever helped who was in so much need as I? Do not abandon me to the frenzy in which you have plunged me; lend me your reason since you have ravished mine; after having corrected me, give me light to complete your work.

I would not deceive you; you will never succeed in subduing my love; but you shall teach me to moderate it: by guiding my conduct, by dictating my speech, you will save me, at least, from the dire misfortune of displeasing you. Dispel above all that dreadful fear; tell me that you forgive me, that you pity me; assure me of your indulgence. You will never have as much as I should desire in you; but I invoke that of which I have need: will you refuse it me?

Adieu, Madame; be kind enough to receive the homage of my sentiments; it hinders not that of my respect.

At the Château de . . . , 20th August, 1777.

## LETTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

**T**HIS is yesterday's bulletin. At eleven o'clock I visited Madame de Rosemonde, and, under her auspices, I was introduced into the presence of the pretended invalid, who was still in her bed. Her eyes looked very worn; I hope she slept as badly as I did. I seized a moment when Madame de Rosemonde had turned away to deliver my letter: it was refused; but I left it on the bed, and went decorously to the side of my old aunt's arm-chair. She wished to be near *her dear child*, It was necessary to conceal the letter to avoid scandal. The invalid was artless enough to say that she thought she had a little fever. Madame de Rosemonde persuaded me to feel her pulse, vaunting mightily my knowledge of medicine. My beauty then had the double vexation of being forced to give me her hand, and of feeling that her little falsehood was to be discovered. I took her hand, which I pressed in one of mine, whilst, with the other, I ran over her fresh and rounded arm. The naughty creature made no response, which impelled me to say, as I withdrew, "There is not even the slightest symptom." I suspected that her gaze would be severe, and, to punish her, I refused to meet it: a moment later she said that she wished to rise, and we left her

alone. She appeared at dinner, which was a sombre one; she gave out that she would not take a walk, which was as much as to tell me that I should have no opportunity of conversing with her. I was well aware that, at this point, I must put in a sigh and a mournful look; no doubt she was waiting for that, for it was the one moment of the day when I succeeded in meeting her eyes. Virtuous as she is, she has her little ruses like another. I found a moment to ask of her "if she had had the kindness to inform me of my fate," and I was somewhat astonished when she answered, "Yes, Monsieur, I have written to you." I was mighty anxious to have this letter, but whether it were a ruse again, or for awkwardness, or shyness, she did not give it to me till the evening, when she was retiring to her apartment. I send it to you, as well as the first draft of mine; read and judge; see with what signal falsity she says that she feels no love, when I am sure of the contrary; and then she will complain if I deceive her afterwards, when she does not fear to deceive me before! My lovely friend, the cleverest of men can do no more than keep on a level with the truest woman. I must needs, however, feign to believe all this nonsense, and weary myself with despair, because it pleases Madame to play at severity! It is hard not to be revenged on such baseness! Ah, patience!.... But adieu. I have still much to write. By the way, return to me the letter of the fair barbarian; it might happen later that she would expect one to attach a value to those wretched sheets, and one must be in order.

I say nothing to you of the little Volanges; we will talk of her at an early day.

At the Château of . . . 22nd August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

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## LETTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH

*The Présidente de Tourvel to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**A**SSUREDLY, Monsieur, you would never have received any letter from me, did not my foolish conduct of yesterday evening compel me to-day to have an explanation with you. Yes, I wept, I confess it : perhaps, too, the words which you are so careful to quote to me did escape me ; tears and words, you remarked everything ; I must then explain to you everything.

Accustomed to inspire only honourable sentiments, to hear only conversation to which I can listen without a blush, and consequently to enjoy a feeling of security which I venture to say I deserve, I know not how either to dissimulate or to combat the impressions I receive. The astonishment and embarrassment into which your conduct threw me ; a fear, I know not of what, inspired by a situation which should never have been thrust upon me ; perhaps, even the revolting idea of seeing myself confounded with the women whom you despise, and treated as lightly as they are : all these causes in conjunction provoked my tears, and may have made me say, I think with reason, that I was wretched. This expression, which you think so strong, would certainly have been far too weak, if my tears and utterance had another motive ; if, instead of disapproving sentiments

which must need offend me, I could have feared lest I should share them.

No, Monsieur, I have not that fear; if I had, I would fly a hundred leagues away from you, I would go and weep in a desert at the misfortune of having known you. Perhaps even, in spite of the certainty in which I am of not loving you, of never loving you, perhaps I should have done better to follow the counsels of my friends, and forbid you to approach me.

I believed, and it is my sole error, I believed that you would respect a virtuous woman, who asked nothing better than to find you so and to do you justice; who already was defending you, whilst you were outraging her with your criminal avowals. You do not know me; no, Monsieur, you do not know me. Otherwise you would not have thought to make a right out of your error: because you had made proposals to me which I ought not to hear, you would not have thought yourself authorized to write me a letter which I ought not to read: and you ask me *to guide your conduct, to dictate to you your speech!* Very well, Monsieur, silence and forgetfulness, those are the counsels which it becomes me to give you, as it will you to follow them; then you will indeed have rights to my indulgence: it will only rest with you to obtain even my gratitude.... But no, I will not address a request to a man who has not respected me; I will give no mark of confidence to a man who has abused my security. You force me to fear, perhaps to hate you: I did not want to; I wished to see in you naught else than the nephew of my most respected friend; I opposed the voice of friendship to the public voice which accused you. You have destroyed it all; and I foresee, you will not want to repair it.

I am anxious, Monsieur, to make it clear to you that your sentiments offend me; that their avowal is an outrage to me, and, above all, that, so far from my coming one day to share them, you would force me to refuse ever again to see you, if you do not impose on yourself, as to this subject, the silence which it seems



to me I have the right to expect and even to demand from you. I enclose in this letter that which you have written to me, and I beg that you will similarly return me this : I should be sincerely grieved if any trace remained of an incident which ought never to have occurred.

I have the honour to be, etc.

At the Château de . . . , 21st August, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH

*Cécile Volanges to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

**L**ORD! how good you are, Madame! how well you understood that it would be easier to me to write to you than to speak! What I have to tell you, too, is very difficult; but is it not true that you are my friend? Oh yes, my very dear friend! I am going to try not to be afraid; and then, I have so much need of you, of your counsels! I am so very grieved, it seems to me that everybody guesses my thoughts; and, especially when he is there, I blush as soon as anyone looks at me. Yesterday, when you saw me crying, it was because I wished to speak to you, and then, I do not know what prevented me; and, when you asked me what was the matter, my tears flowed in spite of myself. I could not have said a single word. But for you, Mamma would have noticed it; and what would have become of me then? That is how I pass my life, especially since four days ago!

It was on that day, Madame, yes, I am going to tell you, it was on that day that M. le Chevalier Danceny wrote to me: oh, I assure you that when I found his letter, I did not know at all what it was: but, not to tell a falsehood, I cannot tell you that I did not take a great deal of pleasure in reading it; you see, I would sooner have

sorrow all my life than that he should not have written it. But I knew well that I ought not to tell him that, and I can even assure you that I told him I was vexed at it; but he said that it was stronger than himself, and I quite believe it; for I had resolved not to answer him, and yet I could not help myself. Oh, I have only written to him once, and even that was partly to tell him not to write to me again: but, in spite of that, he goes on writing to me; and, as I do not answer him, I see quite well that he is sad, and that pains me more still; so much that I no longer know what to do, nor what will happen, and I am much to be pitied.

Tell me, I beg you, Madame, would it be very wrong to reply to him from time to time? Only until he has been able to resolve not to write to me any more himself, and to stay as we were before: for, as for me, if this continues, I do not know what will happen to me. See, in reading his last letter, I cried as though I should never have done; and I am very sure that if I do not answer him again, it will cause us a great deal of pain.

I am going to send you his letter as well, or rather a copy, and you will decide; you will quite see there is no harm in what he asks. However, if you think that it must not be, I promise you to restrain myself; but I believe that you will think like me, and that there is no harm there.

Whilst I am about it, Madame, permit me to ask you one more question. They have always told me that it was wrong to love anyone; but why is that? What makes me ask you is that M. le Chevalier Danceny maintains that it is not wrong at all, and that almost everybody loves; if that is so, I do not see why I should be the only one to refrain from it; or is it then that it is only wrong for young ladies? For I have heard Mamma herself say that Madame D<sup>...</sup> was in love with Monsieur M<sup>...</sup>, and she did not speak of it as a thing which was so very wrong; and yet I am sure she would be angry with me, if she were only to suspect my liking for M. Danceny. She treats me always like a child, does

Mamma; and she tells me nothing at all. I believed, when she took me from the convent, that it was to marry me; but at present it seems no: it is not that I care about it, I assure you; but you who are so friendly with her know, perhaps, how it stands; and, if you know, I hope you will tell me. This is a very long letter, Madame; but, since you have allowed me to write to you, I have profited by it to tell you all, and I count on your friendship.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Paris, 23rd August, 1777.

## LETTER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH

*The Chevalier Danceny to Cécile Volanges.*

**W**HAT, Mademoiselle! you still refuse to answer me! Nothing can bend you, and each day bears away with it the hope which it had brought! What then is this friendship which you agree subsists between us, if it be not even powerful enough to render you sensible to my pain; if it leaves you cold and tranquil, whilst I experience the torments of a fire that I cannot extinguish; if, far from inspiring you with confidence, it does not even suffice to induce your pity? What! your friend suffers and you do nothing to help him! He does but ask you for a word, and you refuse him that! And you wish him to content himself with a sentiment so feeble, of which you even fear to reiterate the assurance!

You would not be ungrateful, you said yesterday: ah, believe me, Mademoiselle, to be ready to repay love with friendship is not to fear ingratitude, it is to dread only having the appearance of it. However, I dare not discuss with you a sentiment which can only be a burden to you, if it does not interest you; I must at least confine it within myself until I learn how to conquer it. I feel how painful this task will be; I do not hide from myself that I shall have need of all my strength; I will attempt every means;

there is one which will cost my heart most dearly, it is that of repeating to myself often that your own is insensible. I will even try to see you less often, and I am already busy in seeking a plausible excuse.

What! I should lose the sweet habit of seeing you every day! Ah, at least I shall never cease to regret it! An eternal sorrow will be the price of the most tender love; and you will have wished it, and it will be your work! Never, I feel it, shall I recover the happiness I lose to-day; you alone were made for my heart; with what delight I would take a vow to live only for you! But this vow you will not accept; your silence teaches me well enough that your heart says nothing to you in my behalf: it is at once the surest proof of your indifference and the most cruel fashion of announcing it to me. Adieu, Mademoiselle.

I dare not flatter myself with the hope of a reply: love would have written to me with impatience, friendship with pleasure, even pity with complacence; but pity, friendship and love are equally strangers to your heart.

Paris, 13th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE TWENTY-NINTH

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay.*

I TOLD you, Sophie, that there were cases in which one might write; and I assure you that I reproach myself greatly with having followed your advice, which has brought so much grief to the Chevalier Danceny and to myself. The proof that I was right is that Madame de Merteuil, who is a woman who surely knows, thinks as I do. I confessed everything to her. She talked to me at first as you did; but when I had explained all to her, she agreed that it was very different; she only asks me to show her all my letters and all those of the Chevalier Danceny, in order to make sure that I say nothing but what I should; thus, at present, I am tranquil. Heavens, how I love Madame de Merteuil! She is so good! and she is a woman very much respected. Thus, there is nothing more to be said.

How I am going to write to M. Danceny, and how pleased he will be! He will be even more so than he thinks, for hitherto I have only spoken of my friendship, and he always wanted me to tell him of my love. I think it was much the same thing; but anyhow, I did not dare, and he longed for that. I told this to Madame de Merteuil; she told me that I was right, and that one

ought not to confess that one feels love, until one can no longer restrain one's self: now I am sure that I could not restrain myself any longer; after all, it is the same thing, and it will give him greater pleasure.

Madame de Merteuil told me also that she would lend me books which spoke of all that, and which would teach me to behave myself properly, and to write better than I know now; for, you see, she tells me of all my faults, which is a proof how much she likes me; she has only recommended me to say nothing to Mamma of these books, because that would seem to suggest that she has neglected my education, and that might vex her. Oh, I shall say nothing about it to her!

It is very extraordinary, however, that a woman who is scarcely related to me should take more care of me than my mother! It is very lucky for me to have known her!

She has also asked Mamma to bring me the day after to-morrow to the Opera, in her box; she has told me that we shall be quite alone there, and we are to talk all the time, without fear of being overheard: I like that much better than the opera. We shall speak also of my marriage: for she has told me that it was quite true that I was to be married; but we have not been able to say more about it. By the way, is it not astonishing that Mamma has said nothing about it at all?

Adieu, my Sophie, I am going to write to the Chevalier Danceny. Oh! I am very happy.

Paris, 24th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.



## LETTER THE THIRTIETH

*Cécile Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny.*

**A**T last, Monsieur, I consent to write to you, to assure you of my friendship, of my *love*, since without that you would be unhappy. You say that I have not a good heart; I assure you, indeed, that you are mistaken, and I hope, at present, you no longer doubt it. If you have been grieved that I have not written to you, do you suppose that that did not grieve me as well? But the fact is that, for nothing in the world, would I like to do anything that was wrong; and I would not even have told you of my love, if I could have prevented myself: but your sadness gave me too much pain. I hope that, at present, you will be sad no longer, and that we shall both be very happy.

I trust to have the pleasure of seeing you this evening, and that you will come early; it will never be so early as I could wish. Mamma is to sup at home, and I believe she will ask you to stay: I hope you will not be engaged as you were the day before yesterday. Was the supper you went to so very agreeable? For you went to it very early. But come, let us not talk of that: now that you know I love you, I hope you will remain with me as much as you can, for I am only happy when I am with you, and I should like you to feel the same.

I am very sorry that you are still sad at this moment, but it is not my fault. I will ask if I may play on the harp as soon as you arrive, in order that you may get my letter at once. I can do no more.

Adieu, Monsieur. I love you well, with my whole heart: the more I tell you, the better pleased I am; I hope that you will be so too.

Paris, 24th August, 1777.

## LETTER THE THIRTY-FIRST

*The Chevalier Danceny to Cécile Volanges.*

**Y**ES, without a doubt, we shall be happy. My happiness is well assured, since I am loved by you ; yours will never end, if it is to last as long as that which you have inspired in me. What ! You love me, you no longer fear to assure me 'of your *love* ! *The more you tell me, the better pleased you are* ! After reading that charming *I love you*, written by your hand, I heard your sweet mouth repeat the confession. I saw fixed upon me those charming eyes, which their expression of tenderness embellished still more. I received your vow to live ever for me. Ah, receive mine, to consecrate my whole life to your happiness ; receive it and be sure that I will never betray it !

What a happy day we passed yesterday ! Ah, why has not Madame de Merteuil secrets to tell your Mamma every day ! Why must it be that the idea of constraint, which follows us, comes to mingle with the delicious recollection which possesses me ? Why can I not hold unceasingly that pretty hand, which has written to me *I love you*, cover it with kisses, and avenge myself so for the refusal you have given me of a greater favour !

Tell me, my Cécile, when your Mamma had returned ; when we

were forced by her presence to have only indifferent looks for one another ; when you could no longer console me, with the assurance of your love, for the refusal you made to give me any proofs of it : did you have no sentiment of regret ? Did you not say to yourself : a kiss would have made him happier, and it is I who have kept this joy from him ? Promise me, my charming friend, that on the first opportunity you will be less severe. With the aid of this promise, I shall find the courage to support the vexations which circumstances have in store for us ; and the cruel privations will be at least softened by my certainty that you share my regret.

Adieu, my charming Cécile : the hour is at hand when I must go to your house. It would be impossible to quit you, were it not to go and see you again. Adieu, you whom I love so dearly ! you whom I shall love ever more and more !

Paris, 25th August, 1777.

## LETTER THE THIRTY-SECOND

*Madame de Volanges to the Présidente de Tourvel.*

**Y**ou ask me then, Madame, to believe in the virtue of M. de Valmont? I confess that I cannot bring myself to it, and that I should find it as hard a task to believe in his honour, from the one fact that you relate to me, as to believe in the viciousness of a man of known probity, for the sake of one error. Humanity is not perfect in any fashion; no more in the case of evil than in that of good. The criminal has his virtues, just as the honest man has his weaknesses. This truth appears to me all the more necessary to believe, in that from it is derived the necessity of indulgence towards the wicked as well as to the good, and that it safeguards the latter from pride as it does the former from discouragement. You will doubtless think that I am practising but sorrily, at this moment, the indulgence which I preach; but I see in it only a dangerous weakness, when it leads us to treat the vicious and the man of integrity alike.

I will not permit myself to criticize the motives of M. de Valmont's action; I would fain believe them as laudable as the act itself: but has he any the less spent his life in involving families in trouble, scandal and dishonour? Listen, if you will, to the voice

of the wretched man he has succoured; but let not that prevent you from hearing the cries of the hundred victims whom he has sacrificed. Were he only, as you say, an instance of the danger of acquaintances, would that make him any less dangerous as an acquaintance himself? You assume him to be capable of a happy reformation? Let us go further: suppose this miracle accomplished; would not public opinion remain against him, and does not that suffice to regulate your conduct? God alone can absolve at the moment of repentance; he reads in men's hearts: but men can only judge of thoughts by deeds; and none amongst them, after having lost the esteem of others, has a right to complain of the necessary distrust which renders this loss so difficult to repair. Remember above all, my dear young friend, that it sometimes suffices to lose this respect, merely to have the air of attaching too little value to it; and do not tax this severity with injustice: for, apart from our being obliged to believe that no one renounces this precious possession who has the right to pretend to it, he is, indeed, more liable to misdoing who is not restrained by this powerful brake. Such, nevertheless, would be the aspect under which an intimate acquaintance with M. de Valmont would display you, however innocent it might be.

Alarmed at the warmth with which you defend him, I hasten to anticipate the objections which I foresee you will make. You will quote Madame de Merteuil, to whom this acquaintance has been pardoned; you will ask me why I receive him at my house; you will tell me that, far from being repulsed by people of honour, he is admitted, sought after, even, in what is called good society. I believe I can answer everything.

To begin with, Madame de Merteuil, a most estimable person indeed, has perhaps no other fault save that of having too much confidence in her own strength; she is a skilful guide who delights in taking a carriage betwixt a mountain and a precipice, and who is only justified by success; it is right to praise her, it would be

imprudent to imitate her; she herself admits it and reproaches herself for it. In proportion as she has seen more, have her principles become more severe; and I do not fear to assure you that she would think as I do.

As to what concerns myself, I will not justify myself more than others. No doubt I receive M. de Valmont, and he is received everywhere: it is one inconsistency the more to add to the thousand others which rule society. You know, as well as I do, how one passes one's life in remarking them, bemoaning them, and submitting to them. M. de Valmont, with a great name, a great fortune, many amiable qualities, early recognized that, to obtain an empire over society, it was sufficient to employ, with equal skill, praise and ridicule. None possesses as he does this double talent: he seduces with the one, and makes himself feared with the other. People do not esteem him; but they flatter him. Such is his existence in the midst of a world which, more prudent than courageous, would rather humour than combat him.

But neither Madame de Merteuil herself, nor any other woman, would for a moment think of shutting herself up in the country, almost in solitude, with such a man. It was reserved for the most virtuous, the most modest of them all to set the example of such an inconsistency: forgive the word, it escapes from my friendship. My lovely friend, your very virtue betrays you by the security with which it fills you. Reflect then that you will have for judges, on the one side, frivolous folk, who will not believe in a virtue the pattern of which they do not find in themselves; and on the other, the ill-natured, who will feign not to believe in it, in order to punish you for its possession. Consider that you are doing, at this moment, what certain men would not venture to risk. In fact, amongst our young men, of whom M. de Valmont has only too much rendered himself the oracle, I remark the most prudent fear to seem too intimate with him; and you, are you not afraid? Ah, come back, come back, I conjure you! . . . . If my reasons are not

sufficient to convince you, yield to my friendship ; it is that which makes me renew my entreaties, it is for that to justify them. You think it severe, and I trust that it may be needless ; but I would rather you had to complain of its anxiety than of its neglect.

Paris, 24th August, 1777.



## LETTER THE THIRTY-THIRD

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

THE moment that you are afraid of success, my dear Vicomte, the moment that your plan is to furnish arms against yourself and that you are less desirous to conquer than to fight, I have no more to say to you. Your conduct is a masterpiece of prudence. It would be one of folly in the contrary supposition; and, to tell the truth, I fear that you are under an illusion.

What I reproach you with is not that you did not take advantage of the moment. On the one side, I do not clearly see that it had arrived; on the other, I am quite aware, although they assert the contrary, that an occasion once missed returns, whereas one never recovers a too precipitate action. But the real blunder is that you should have let yourself start a correspondance. I defy you at present to foretell whither that may lead you. Do you hope, by any chance, to prove to this woman that she must surrender? It appears to me that therein can only lie a truth of sentiment and not of demonstration; and that to make her admit it is a matter of acting on her feelings, and not of arguing; but in what will it serve you to move her by letter, since you will not be at hand to profit by it? If your fine phrases produce the intoxication of love, do you

flatter yourself that it will last so long that there will be no time left for reflexion to prevent the confession of it? Reflect only of the time it takes to write a letter, of that which passes before it can be delivered, and see whether a woman, especially one with the principles of your *dévoté*, can wish so long that which is her endeavour to wish never. This method may succeed with children, who, when they write, "I love you," do not know that they say "I yield myself." But the argumentative virtue of Madame de Tourvel seems to me to be fully aware of the value of terms. Thus, in spite of the advantage which you had over her in your conversation, she beats you in her letter. And then, do you know what happens? Merely for the sake of argument, one refuses to yield. By dint of searching for good reasons, one finds, one tells them; and afterwards one clings to them, not because they are good, so much as in order not to give one's self the lie.

In addition, a point which I wonder you have not yet made: there is nothing so difficult in love as to write what you do not feel. I mean to write in a convincing manner: it is not that you do not employ the same words, but you do not arrange them in the same way; or rather, you arrange them, and that suffices. Read over your letter: there is an order presiding over it which betrays you at each turn. I would fain believe that your *Présidente* is too little formed to perceive it: but what matter? it has no less failed of its effect. It is the mistake of novels; the author whips himself to grow heated, and the reader remains cold. *Héloïse* is the only one which forms an exception, and, in spite of the talent of the author, this observation has ever made me believe that the substance of it was true. It is not the same in speaking. The habit of working the instrument gives sensibility to it; the facility of tears is added; the expression of desire in the eyes is confounded with that of tenderness; in short, the less coherent speech promotes more easily that air of trouble and confusion which is the true eloquence

of love; and above all the presence of the beloved object forbids reflexion, and makes us desire to be won.

Believe me, Vicomte: you are asked to write no more; take advantage of that to retrieve your mistake, and wait for an opportunity to speak. Do you know, this woman has more strength than I believed? Her defence is good; and, but for the length of her letter, and the pretext which she gives you to return to the question in her phrase about gratitude, she would not have betrayed herself at all.

What appears to me, again, to ensure your success is the fact that she uses too much strength at one time; I foresee that she will exhaust it in the defence of the word, and that no more will be left her for that of the thing.

I return you your two letters, and, if you are prudent, they will be the two last, until after the happy moment. If it were not so late, I would speak to you of the little Volanges who is coming on quickly enough, and with whom I am greatly pleased. I believe that I shall have finished before you, and you ought to be very glad thereat. Adieu, for to-day.

Paris, 24th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE THIRTY-FOURTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

**Y**ou speak with perfect truth, my fair friend: but why put yourself to so much fatigue to prove what nobody disputes? To move fast in love, 'tis better to speak than to write; that is, I believe, the whole of your letter. Why, those are the most simple elements in the art of seduction! I will only remark that you make but one exception to this principle, and that there are two. To children, who walk in this way from shyness and yield themselves from ignorance, must be added the *femmes beaux-esprits*, who let themselves be enticed therein by self-conceit and whom vanity leads into the snare. For instance, I am quite sure that the Comtesse de B\*\*\*, who answered my first letter without any difficulty, had, at that time, no more love for me than I for her, and that she only saw an occasion for treating a subject which should be worthy of her pen.

However that may be, an advocate will tell you that principles are not applicable to the question. In fact, you suppose that I have a choice between writing and speaking, which is not the case. Since the affair of the 19th, my fair barbarian, who keeps on the defensive, has shown a skill in avoiding interviews which has dis-

concerted my own. So much so that, if this continues, I shall be forced to occupy myself seriously with the means of regaining this advantage; for assuredly I will not be routed by her in any way. My letters even are the subject of a little war; not content with leaving them unanswered, she refuses to receive them. For each one a fresh artifice is necessary, and it does not always succeed.

You will remember by what a simple means I gave her the first; the second presented no further difficulty. She had asked me to return her letter; I gave her my own instead, without her having the least suspicion. But whether from vexation at having been caught, or from caprice or, in short, virtue, for she will force me to believe in it, she obstinately refused the third. I hope, however, that the embarrassment into which the consequence of this refusal has happened to throw her will correct her for the future.

I was not much surprised that she would not receive this letter, which I offered her quite simply; that would already have been to grant a certain favour, and I am prepared for a longer defence. After this essay, which was but an attempt made in passing, I put my letter in an envelope, and seizing the moment of the toilette, when Madame de Rosemonde and the chamber-maid were present, I sent it her by my *chasseur*, with an order to tell her that it was the paper for which she had asked me. I had rightly guessed that she would dread the scandalous explanation which a refusal would necessitate; she took the letter; and my ambassador, who had received orders to observe her face, and who has good eyes, did but perceive a slight blush, and more embarrassment than anger.

I congratulated myself then, for sure, either that she would keep this letter, or that, if she wished to return it to me, it would be necessary for her to find herself alone with me, which would give me a good occasion to speak. About an hour afterwards, one of her people entered my room, and handed me, on behalf of his mistress, a packet of another shape than mine, on the envelope of which I recognized the writing so greatly longed for. I opened

it in haste . . . . It was my letter itself, the seal unbroken, merely folded in two. I suspect that her fear that I might be less scrupulous than herself on the subject of scandal had made her employ this devil's ruse.

You know me : I need be at no pains to depict to you my fury. It was necessary, however, to regain one's *sang-froid*, and seek for fresh methods. This is the only one that I found :

They send from here every morning to fetch the letters from the post, which is about three quarters of a league away : they employ for this purpose a box with a lid almost like an alms-box, of which the post-master has one key and Madame de Rosemonde the other. Everyone puts his letters in it during the day, when it seems good to him : in the evening they are carried to the post, and in the morning those which have arrived are sent for. All the servants, strange or otherwise, perform this service. It was not the turn of my servant ; but he undertook to go, under the pretext that he had business in that direction.

Meantime I wrote my letter. I disguised my handwriting in the address, and I counterfeited with some skill upon the envelope the stamp of Dijon. I chose this town, because I found it merrier, since I was asking for the same rights as the husband, to write also from the same place, and also because my fair had spoken all day of the desire she had to receive letters from Dijon. It seemed to me only right to procure her this pleasure.

These precautions once taken, it was easy enough to add this letter to the others. I moreover succeeded by this expedient in being a witness of the reception ; for the custom is to assemble for breakfast, and to wait for the arrival of the letters before separating.

Madame de Rosemonde opened the box. " From Dijon ", she said, giving the letter to Madame de Tourvel.

" It is not my husband's writing," she answered in a troubled voice, hastily breaking the seal.

The first glances instructed her ; and her face underwent such

an alteration that Madame de Rosemonde perceived it, and asked, "What is the matter with you?"

I also drew near, saying, "Is this letter then so very dreadful?"

The shy *dévote* dared not raise her eyes; she said not a word; and, to hide her embarrassment, pretended to run over the epistle, which she was scarcely in a state to read. I enjoyed her confusion, and not being sorry to gird her a little, I added, "Your more tranquil air bids me hope that this letter has caused you more astonishment than pain." Anger then inspired her better than prudence could have done.

"It contains," she answered, "things which offend me, and that I am astounded anyone has dared to write to me."

"Who has sent it?" interrupted Madame de Rosemonde.

"It is not signed," answered the angry fair one; "but the letter and its author inspire me with equal contempt. You will oblige me by speaking no more of it."

With that she tore up the audacious missive, put the pieces into her pocket, rose, and left the room.

In spite of this anger she has none the less had my letter; and I rely upon her curiosity to have taken care that she read it through.

The detailed relation of the day would take me too far. I add to this account the first draft of my two letters; you will thus be as fully informed as myself. If you want to be *au courant* with this correspondence, you must accustom yourself to deciphering my minutes; for nothing in the world could I support the tedium of copying them. Adieu, my lovely friend!

At the Château de . . . , 25th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE THIRTY-FIFTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel.*

I must needs obey you, Madame; I must prove to you that, in the midst of the faults which you are pleased to ascribe to me, there is left me at least enough delicacy not to permit myself a reproach, and enough courage to impose on myself the most grievous sacrifices. You order me to be silent and to forget! Well! I will force my love to be silent; and I will forget, if that be possible, the cruel manner in which you have met it. Doubtless my desire to please you did not bear with it the right; and more, I confess that the need I had of your indulgence was not a title to obtain it: but you look upon my love as an outrage; you forget that if it could be a wrong, you would be at once its cause and its excuse.

You forget also, that, accustomed to open my soul to you, even when that confidence might hurt me, it was impossible for me to conceal from you the sentiments by which I was penetrated; and that which was the result of my good faith you consider as the fruit of my audacity. As a reward for the most tender, the most respectful, the truest love, you cast me afar from you. You speak to me, lastly, of your hatred.... What other than myself would not complain at being so treated? I alone submit; I support it all.



and murmur not ; you strike, and I adore. The inconceivable power which you have over me renders you absolute mistress of my feelings ; and if only my love resists you, if you cannot destroy that, it is because it is your work and not my own.

I do not ask for a love which I never flattered myself I should receive. I do not even ask for that pity for which the interest you had sometimes displayed in me might have allowed me to hope. But, I admit, I think I can count on your sense of justice.

You inform me, Madame, that people have sought to damage me in your opinion. If you had believed the counsels of your friends, you would not even have let me approach you : those are your expressions. Who then are these officious friends ? No doubt those people of such severity, and of so rigid a virtue, consent to be named ; no doubt they would not cover themselves in an obscurity which would confound them with vile calumniators ; and I shall not be left ignorant either of their names or of their accusations. Reflect, Madame, that I have the right to know both, since it is after them you judge me. One does not condemn a culprit without naming his accusers. I ask no other favour, and I promise in advance to justify myself, and to force them to retract.

If I have, perhaps, too much despised the vain clamours of a public of which I make so little case, it is not thus with your esteem ; and when I devote my life to meriting that, I shall not let it be ravished from me with impunity. It becomes all the more precious to me, in that I shall owe to it doubtless that request which you fear to make me, and which would give me, you say, *rights to your gratitude*. Ah ! far from exacting it, I shall believe myself your debtor, if you procure me the occasion of being agreeable to you. Begin then to do me greater justice by not leaving me in ignorance of what you desire of me. If I could guess it, I would spare you the trouble of saying it. To the pleasure of seeing you, add the happiness of serving you, and I will congratulate myself on your indulgence. What then can prevent you ? It is not,

I hope, the fear of a refusal: I feel that I could not pardon you that. It is not only that I do not return you your letter. More than you do I desire that it be no longer necessary to me: but accustomed as I am to believing in the gentleness of your soul, it is only in that letter that I can find you such as you would appear. When I frame the vow to render you less hard, I see there that, rather than consent, you would place yourself a hundred leagues away from me; when everything in you augments and justifies my love, it is that still which repeats to me that my love is an outrage to you; and when, seeing you, that love seems to me the supreme good, I needs must read you to feel that it is but a fearful torture. You can imagine now that my greatest happiness would be to be able to return you this fatal letter: to ask me for it now would be to authorize me to believe no longer what it contains; you do not doubt, I hope, of my eagerness to return it to you.

At the Château de . . . , 21st August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE THIRTY-SIXTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel.*

(Bearing the postmark of Dijon)

**Y**our severity augments daily, Madame; and, if I dare say it, you seem to be less afraid of being unjust than of being indulgent. After having condemned me without a hearing, you must have felt, in fact, that 'twere easier for you not to read my arguments than to reply to them. You refuse my letters obstinately; you send them back to me with contempt. You force me, at last, to have recourse to a ruse, at the very moment when my only aim is to convince you of my good faith. The necessity in which you have put me to defend myself will doubtless suffice to excuse my means. Convinced, moreover, by the sincerity of my sentiments that, to justify them in your eyes, it is sufficient merely that you should know them thoroughly, I thought that I might permit myself this slight artifice. I dare believe also that you will pardon me, and that you will be little surprised that love is more ingenious in presenting itself than indifference in repelling it.

Allow then, Madame, my heart to be entirely revealed to you. It belongs to you, and it is just that you should know it.

I was very far from foreseeing, when I arrived at Madame de

Rosemonde's, the fate which awaited me. I did not know that you were there, and I will add, with the sincerity which characterizes me, that, if I had known, my sense of security would not have been troubled: not that I did not render to your beauty the justice which one could not refuse it; but, accustomed as I was to feel only desires, and to yield myself only to those which were encouraged by hope, I did not know the torments of love.

You were a witness of the efforts which Madame de Rosemonde made to keep me for some time. I had already passed one day with you, and yet I yielded, or at least believed that I yielded, only to the pleasure, so natural and so legitimate, of showing respect to a worthy relative. The kind of life which one led here doubtless differed greatly from that to which I was accustomed; it cost me nothing to conform to it; and, without seeking to penetrate into the cause of the change which was operating within me, I attributed it as yet solely to that easy-going character of which I believe I have already spoken to you.

Unfortunately (yet why need it be a misfortune?) coming to know you better, I soon discovered that that bewitching face, which alone had struck me, was but the least of your attractions; your heavenly soul astonished and seduced my own. I admired the beauty, I worshipped the virtue. Without pretending to win you, I bestirred myself to deserve you. In begging your indulgence for the past, I was ambitious of your support for the future. I sought for it in your utterance, I spied for it in your eyes, in that glance whence came a poison all the more dangerous in that it was distilled without design, and received without distrust.

Then I knew love. But how far was I from complaining. Determined to bury it in an eternal silence, I abandoned myself without fear, as without reserve, to this delicious sentiment. Each day augmented its sway. Soon the pleasure of seeing you was changed to a need. Were you absent for a moment my heart was sore with sadness; at the sound which announced your return, it pal-

pitated with joy. I only existed for you and through you. Nevertheless, it is yourself whom I call to witness: in the merriment of our heedless sports or in the interest of a serious conversation, did ever one word escape me which could betray the secret of my heart?

At last a day arrived when my evil fortune was to commence; by an inconceivable fatality, a good deed was to be the signal for it. Yes, Madame, it was in the midst of those unfortunates whom I had succoured that, abandoning yourself to that precious sensibility which embellishes even beauty and adds value to virtue, you completed your work of destroying a heart which was already intoxicated with excess of love. You will remember, perhaps, what a moodiness came over me on our return! Alas! I was seeking to fight against an affection which I felt was becoming stronger than myself.

It was after I had exhausted my strength in this unequal contest, that an unforeseen hazard made me find myself alone with you. There, I confess, I succumbed. My heart was too full, and could withhold neither its utterance nor its tears. But is this then a crime? and if it be one, is it not amply punished by the dire torments to which I am abandoned?

Devoured by a love without hope, I implore your pity and I meet only with your hate: with no other happiness than that of seeing you, my eyes seek you in spite of myself, and I tremble to meet your gaze. In the cruel state to which you have reduced me, I pass my days in dissimulating my grief and my nights in abandoning myself to it; whilst you, peaceful and calm, know of these torments only to cause them and to applaud yourself for them. None the less, it is you who complain and I who make excuse.

That, however, Madame, is the faithful relation of what you call my injuries, which it would, perhaps, be more just to call my misfortunes. A pure and sincere love, a respect which has never belied itself, a perfect submission; such are the sentiments with which you have inspired me. I would not fear to present my

homage of them to the Divinity Himself. O you, who are His fairest handiwork, imitate Him in His indulgence! Think on my cruel pains; think, above all, that, placed by you between despair and supreme felicity, the first word which you shall utter will for ever decide my lot.

At the Château de . . . , 23rd August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE THIRTY-SEVENTH

### *The Présidente de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges*

**I** YIELD, Madame, to the counsels which your friendship give me. Accustomed as I am to defer in all things to your opinions, I am ready to believe that they are always based on reason. I will even admit that M. de Valmont must be, indeed, infinitely dangerous, if he can, at the same time, feign to be what he appears here and remain such a man as you paint him. However that may be, since you request it, I will keep him away from me; at least I will do my utmost: for often things which ought to be at bottom the most simple become embarrassing in practice.

It still seems to me impracticable to make this request to his aunt; it would be equally ungracious both to her and to him. Neither would I adopt the course, without the greatest repugnance, of going away myself: for apart from the reasons I have already given you relative to M. de Tourvel, if my departure were to annoy M. de Valmont, as is possible, would it not be easy for him to follow me to Paris? And his return, of which I should be—or at least should appear—the motive, would it not seem more strange than a meeting in the country, at the house of a lady who is known to be his relation and my friend?

There is left me then no other resource than to induce himself to consent to going away. I know that this proposal is difficult to make; however, as he seems to me to have set his heart on proving to me that he has, effectually, more honesty than is attributed to him, I do not despair of success. I shall not be sorry even to attempt it, and to have an occasion of judging whether, as he has often said, truly virtuous women never have had, and never will have, to complain of his behaviour. If he leaves, as I desire, it will indeed be out of consideration for me; for I cannot doubt but that he proposes to spend a great part of the autumn here. If he refuses my request and insists upon remaining, there will still be time for me to leave myself, and that I promise you.

That is, I believe, Madame, all that your friendship demanded of me; I am eager to satisfy it, and to prove to you that in spite of the *warmth* I may have used to defend M. de Valmont, I am none the less disposed, not only to heed, but also to follow, the counsels of my friends.

I have the honour to be, etc.

At the Château de..., 25th August, 1777.



## LETTER THE THIRTY-EIGHTH

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**Y**OUR enormous budget, my dear Vicomte, has this moment arrived. If the date on it is exact, I ought to have received it twenty-four hours earlier; be that as it may, if I were to take the time to read it, I should have none left to reply to it. I prefer then simply to acknowledge it now, and we will talk of something else. It is not that I have anything to say to you on my own account; the autumn leaves hardly a single man with a human face in Paris, so that for the last month I have been perishing with virtue; and anyone else than my Chevalier would be fatigued with the proofs of my constancy. Being unable to occupy myself, I distract myself with the little Volanges, and it is of her that I wish to speak.

Do you know that you have lost more than you believe, in not undertaking this child? She is really delicious! She has neither character nor principles; judge how sweet and easy her society will be. I do not think she will ever shine by sentiment; but everything announces in her the liveliest sensations. Lacking wit and subtlety, she has, however, if one may so speak, a certain natural falseness which sometimes astonishes even me, and which will be all the more successful, in that her face presents the image of candour and

ingenuousness. She is naturally very caressing, and I sometimes amuse myself thereby: her little head grows excited with incredible rapidity, and she is then all the more delightful, because she knows nothing, absolutely nothing, of all that she so greatly desires to know. She is seized with quite droll fits of impatience; she laughs, pouts, cries, and then begs me to teach her with a truly seductive good faith. Really, I am almost jealous of the man for whom that pleasure is reserved.

I do not know if I have told you that for the last four or five days I have had the honour of being in her confidence. You can very well guess that, at first, I simulated severity: but as soon as I perceived that she thought she had convinced me with her bad reasons, I had the air of taking them for good ones; and she is intimately persuaded that she owes this success to her eloquence: this precaution was necessary in order not to compromise myself. I have permitted her to write, and to say *I love*; and the same day, without her suspecting it, I contrived for her a *tête-à-tête* with her Danceny. But imagine, he is still such a fool that he did not even obtain a kiss. The lad, however, writes mighty pretty verses! La, how silly these witty folks are! This one is, to such a degree that he embarrasses me; for, as for him, I cannot well drive him!

It is at this moment that you would be very useful to me. You are sufficiently intimate with Danceny to obtain his confidence, and, if he once gave it you, we should advance at full speed. Make haste, then, with your Présidente; for, indeed, I will not have Gercourt escape: for the rest, I spoke of him yesterday to the little person, and depicted him so well to her that, if she had been his wife for ten years, she could not hate him more. I preached much to her, however, upon the subject of conjugal fidelity; nothing could equal my severity on this point. By that, on the one side, I restore my reputation for virtue with her, which too much condescension might destroy; on the other, I augment in her that hatred with which I wish to gratify her husband. And, finally, I

hope that, by making her believe that it is not permitted her to give way to love, except during the short time that she remains a girl, she will more quickly decide to lose none of that time.

Adieu, Vicomte; I am going to attend to my toilette, what time I will read your volume.

Paris, 27th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE THIRTY-NINTH

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay.*

I AM sad and anxious, my dear Sophie. I wept almost all night. It is not that I am not, for the moment, very happy, but I foresee that it will not last.

I went yesterday to the Opera with Madame de Merteuil; we spoke much of my marriage, and I have learned no good of it. It is M. le Comte de Gercourt whom I am to wed, and it is to be in the month of October. He is rich, he is a man of quality, he is colonel of the Regiment of ——. So far, all very well. But, to begin with, he is old: imagine, he is at least thirty-six! and then, Madame de Merteuil says he is gloomy and stern, and she fears I shall not be happy with him. I could even see quite well that she was sure of it, only that she would not say so for fear of grieving me. She hardly talked to me of anything the whole evening, except of the duties of wives to their husbands: she admits that M. de Gercourt is not at all lovable, and yet she says I must love him. Did she not say also that, once married, I ought not to love the Chevalier Danceny any longer? as though that were possible! Oh, you can be very sure I shall love him always! Do you know, I would prefer not to be married. Let this M. de Gercourt look after

himself, I never went in search of him. He is in Corsica at present, far away from here ; I wish he would stay there ten years. If I were not afraid of being sent back to the convent, I would certainly tell Mamma that I don't want a husband like that ; but that would be still worse. I am very much embarrassed. I feel that I have never loved M. Danceny so well as I do now ; and when I think that I have only a month more left me, to be as I am now, the tears rush suddenly to my eyes ; I have no consolation except the friendship of Madame de Merleuil ; she has such a good heart ! She shares in all my troubles as much as I do myself ; and then she is so amiable that, when I am with her, I hardly think any more of them. Besides, she is very useful to me, for the little that I know she has taught me : and she is so good that I can tell her all I think, without being in the least ashamed. When she finds that it is not right, she scolds me sometimes ; but only quite gently, and then I embrace her with all my heart, until she is no longer cross. Her, at any rate, I can love as much as I like, without there being any harm in it, and that pleases me very much. We have agreed, however, that I am not to have the appearance of being so fond of her before everybody, and especially not before Mamma, so that she may have no suspicions about the Chevalier Danceny. I assure you that, if I could always live as I do now, I believe I should be very happy. It's only that horrid M. de Gercourt.... But I will say no more about him, else I should get sad again. Instead of that, I am going to write to the Chevalier Danceny ; I shall only speak to him of my love and not of my troubles, for I do not want to distress him.

Adieu, my dear friend. You can see now that you would be wrong to complain, and that however *busy* I have been, as you say, there is time left me, all the same, to love you and to write to you.

## LETTER THE FORTIETH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

**N**ot content with leaving my letters without reply, with refusing to receive them, my inhuman wretch wishes to deprive me of the sight of her; she insists on my departure. What will astonish you more is that I am submitting to her severity. You will blame me. However, I thought I ought not to lose the opportunity of obeying a command, persuaded as I am, on the one side, that to command, is to commit one's self; and on the other, that that illusive authority which we have the appearance of allowing women to seize is one of the snares which they find it most difficult to elude. Nay, more, the skill which this one has shown in avoiding a solitary encounter with me placed me in a dangerous situation, from which I thought I was bound to escape, whatever might be the cost: for, being constantly with her, without being able to occupy her with my love, there was reason to fear that she might grow accustomed to seeing me without trouble, a disposition from which you know how difficult it is to return.

For the rest, you may guess that I did not submit without conditions. I was even at the pains to impose one which it was impossible to grant, as much for the sake of remaining always free to keep

my word or break it, as to promote a discussion, either by word of mouth or in writing, at a time when my beauty is more contented with me, or has need that I should be so with her: not to reckon that I should show a signal lack of skill if I did not find a means to obtain some compensation for my desisting from this pretension, unlenable as it may be.

After having explained my motives in this long preamble, I come to the history of the last two days. I enclose as documentary evidence my beauty's letter and my reply. You will agree that few historians are as precise as I.

You will remember the effect produced by my letter from Dijon, on the morning of the day before yesterday; the rest of the day was most stormy. The pretty prude only appeared at dinner-time, and gave out that she had a violent headache: a pretext with which she masked one of the most furious fits of ill-humour that a woman could have. It absolutely altered her face; the expression of gentleness, which you know, was changed into a rebellious air which gave it a fresh loveliness. I promise myself to make use of this discovery, and to replace sometimes the tender mistress with the sullen.

I foresaw that the time after dinner would be dull; and, to escape from ennui, I made a pretext of having letters to write, and retired to my own rooms. I returned to the salon about six o'clock: Madame de Rosemonde suggested a drive, which was agreed to. But just as we were getting into the carriage, the pretended invalid, with infernal malice, alleged in her turn—perhaps to avenge herself for my absence—an increase of the pain, and compelled me pitilessly to support a *tête-à-tête* with my old aunt. I know not whether the imprecations which I called down on this feminine demon were heeded; but we found her gone to bed on our return.

On the following day, at breakfast, it was not the same woman. Her natural sweetness had returned, and I had reason to believe myself pardoned. Breakfast was hardly over, when the sweet person

rose with an indolent air, and went into the park; as you may believe I followed her. "Whence can spring this desire for walking?" said I, accosting her. "I wrote much, this morning," she answered, "and my head is a little tired." "I am not fortunate enough," I went on, "to have to reproach myself with this fatigue?" "Indeed, I have written to you," she answered again, "but I hesitate to give you my letter. It contains a request, and you have not accustomed me to hope for success." "Ah! I swear, if it be possible—" "Nothing could be easier," she broke in; "and although you ought, perhaps to grant it out of justice, I consent to obtain it as a grace." As she said these words, she handed me her letter; seizing it, I also seized her hand, which she drew away, but without anger, and with more embarrassment than vivacity. The heat is even greater than I thought," she said, "I must go indoors." And she retraced her steps to the *chateau*. I made vain efforts to persuade her to continue her walk, and I needed to remind myself that we might be observed, in order to employ no more than eloquence. She entered without a word, and I saw plainly that this pretended walk had no other object than to hand me my letter. She went up to her own room as soon as we came in, and I withdrew to mine, to read the epistle, which you will do well to read also, as well as my reply, before proceeding further....



## LETTER THE FORTY-FIRST

*The Présidente de Tourvel to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**I**T seems to me, Monsieur, by your behaviour, as though you did but seek to multiply daily the causes of complaint which I have against you. Your obstinacy in wishing unceasingly to approach me with a sentiment which I would not and may not heed, the abuse which you have not feared to take of my good faith, or of my timidity, in order to put your letters into my hands; above all the method, most indelicate I venture to call it, which you employed to make the last reach me, without the slightest fear of the effect of a surprise which might have compromised me; all ought to give occasion on my part to reproaches as keen as they are merited. However, instead of returning to these grievances, I confine myself to putting a request to you, as simple as it is just; and if I obtain it from you, I consent that all shall be forgotten.

You yourself have said to me, Monsieur, that I need not fear a refusal; and, although, by an inconsistency which is peculiar to you, this very phrase was followed by the only refusal which you could make me, I would fain believe that you will none the less keep to-day that word, given to me formally so few days ago.

I desire you then to have the complaisance to go away from me;

to leave this *château*, where a further stay on your part could not but expose me more to the judgment of a public which is ever ready to think ill of others, and which you have but too well accustomed to fix its gaze upon the women who admit you to their society. Already warned, long ago, of this danger by my friends, I neglected, I even disputed their warning, so long as your behaviour towards myself could make me believe that you would not confound me with the host of women who all have had reason to complain of you. To-day, when you treat me like them, as I can no longer but know, I owe it to the public, to my friends, to myself, to adopt this necessary course. I might add here that you would gain nothing by denying my request, as I am determined to leave myself, if you insist on remaining; but I do not seek to diminish the obligation which you will confer on me by this complaisance, and I am quite willing that you should know that, by rendering my departure hence necessary, you would upset my arrangements. Prove to me then, Monsieur, that, as you have so often told me, virtuous women shall never have cause to complain of you; prove, at least, that, when you have done them wrong, you know how to repair it. If I thought I had need to justify my request to you, it would suffice to say that you have spent your life in rendering it necessary; and that, notwithstanding, it has not rested with me that I should ever make it. But let us not recall events which I would forget, and which would oblige me to judge you with rigour at a moment when I offer you an opportunity of earning all my gratitude. Adieu, Monsieur; your conduct will teach me with what sentiments I must be, for life, your most humble, etc.

At the *Château* de..., 25th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FORTY-SECOND

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel.*

**H**OWEVER hard, Madame, the conditions that you impose on me, I do not refuse to fulfil them. I feel that it would be impossible or me to thwart any of your desires. Once agreed upon this point, dare flatter myself in my turn that you will permit me to make certain requests of you, far easier to grant than your own, which, however, I do not wish to obtain, save by my complete submission to your will.

The one, which I hope will be solicited by your sense of justice, is to be so good as to name to me those who have accused me to you ; they have done me, it seems, harm enough to give me the right of knowing them : the other, which I expect from your indulgence, is kindly to permit me to repeat to you sometimes the homage of a love which will now, more than ever, deserve your pity.

Reflect, Madame, that I am hastening to obey you, even when I can but do it at the expense of my happiness ; I will say more, in spite of my conviction that you only desire my absence in order to spare yourself the spectacle, always painful, of the object of your injustice.

Admit, Madame, you are less afraid of a public which is too much used to respecting you to dare form a disrespectful judgment upon you than you are annoyed by the presence of a man whom you find it easier to punish than to blame. You drive me away from you as one turns away one's eyes from some poor wretch whom one does not wish to succour.

But, whereas absence is about to redouble my torments, to whom other than you can I address my complaints? From whom else can I expect the consolations which are about to become so necessary to me? Will you refuse me them, when you alone cause my pains?

Doubtless, you will not be astonished either that, before I leave, I have it in my heart to justify to you the sentiments which you have inspired in me; as also that I do not find the courage to go away until I receive the order from your mouth. This twofold reason compels me to ask you for a moment's interview. In vain would we seek to supply the place of that by letters: one may write volumes and explain poorly what a quarter of an hour's conversation were enough to leave amply understood. You will easily find the time to accord it me; for however eager I may be to obey you, you know that Madame de Rosemonde is aware of my intention to spend a part of the autumn with her, and I must at least wait for a letter in order to have the pretext of some business to call me away.

Adieu, Madame; never has this word cost me so much to write as at this moment, when it brings me back to the idea of our separation. If you could imagine what it makes me suffer, I dare believe you would have some thanks for my docility. At least, receive with more indulgence the assurance and the homage of the most tender and the most respectful love.

At the Château de . . . , 26th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## CONTINUATION OF LETTER THE FORTIETH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

AND now let us sum up, my lovely friend. You can feel, like myself, how the scrupulous, the virtuous Madame de Tourvel cannot grant me the first of my requests, and betray the confidence of her friends, by naming to me my accusers; thus, by promising everything on this condition, I pledge myself to nothing. But you will feel also that the refusal which she will give me will become a title to obtain everything else; and that then I gain, by going away, the advantage of entering into a regular correspondence with her, and by her consent: for I take small account of the interview which I ask of her, and which has hardly any other object than that of accustoming her beforehand not to refuse me others when they become really needful.

The only thing which remains for me to do before my departure is to find out who are the people who busy themselves with damaging me in her eyes. I presume it is her pedant of a husband; I would fain have it so: apart from the fact that a conjugal prohibition is a spur to desire, I should feel sure that, from the moment my beauty has consented to write to me, I should have nothing to fear from her husband, since she would already be under the necessity of deceiving him.

But if she has a friend intimate enough to possess her confidence, and this friend be against me, it seems to me necessary to embroil them, and I count on succeeding in that: but before all I must be rightly informed.

I quite thought that I was going to be yesterday; but this woman does nothing like another. We were visiting her at the moment when it was announced that dinner was ready. Her toilette was only just completed; and while I bestirred myself and made my apologies, I perceived that she had left the key in her writing-desk; and I knew her custom was not to remove that of her apartment. I was thinking of this during dinner, when I heard her waiting-maid come down: I seized my chance at once; I pretended that my nose was bleeding, and left the room. I flew to the desk; but I found all the drawers open and not a sheet of writing. Yet one has no opportunity of burning papers at this season. What does she do with the letters she receives? And she receives them often. I neglected nothing; everything was open, and I sought everywhere; but I gained nothing except a conviction that this precious store-house must be her pocket.

How to obtain them? Ever since yesterday I have been busying vainly in seeking for a means: yet I cannot overcome the desire. I regret that I have not the talents of a thief. Should these not, in fact, enter into the education of a man who is mixed up in intrigues? Would it not be agreeable to filch the letter or the portrait of a rival, or to pick from the pockets of a prude the wherewithal to unmask her? But our parents have no thought for anything; and for me, 'tis all very well to think of everything, I do but perceive that I am clumsy, without being able to remedy it.

However that may be, I returned to table much dissatisfied. My beauty, however, soothed my ill-humour somewhat, with the air of interest which my pretended indisposition gave her; and I did not fail to assure her that for some time past I had had violent agitations which had disturbed my health. Convinced as she' is

that it is she who causes them, ought she not, in all conscience, to endeavour to assuage them? But *dévoté* though she be, she has small stock of charity; she refuses all amorous alms, and such a refusal, to my view, justifies a theft. But adieu; for all the time I talk to you, I am thinking of those cursed letters.

At the Château de . . . , 27th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FORTY-THIRD

*The Présidente de Tourvel to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

WHY seek, Monsieur, to diminish my gratitude? Why be willing to give me but a half-obedience, and make, as it were, a bargain of an honourable action? Is it not sufficient for you then that I feel the cost of it? You not only ask much, but you ask things which are impossible. If, in truth, my friends have spoken to me of you, they have only done it in my interest: even if they have been deceived, their intention was none the less good; and you propose to me to reward this mark of attachment on their part by delivering you their secret! I have already done wrong in speaking to you of it, and you make me very conscious of that at this moment. What would have been no more than candour with another becomes a blunder with you, and would lead me to an ignominy did I yield to you. I appeal to yourself, to your honour; did you think me capable of such a proceeding? Ought you to have suggested it to me? No, without a doubt; and I am sure that, on further reflexion, you will not repeat this request.

That which you make as to writing to me is scarcely easier to grant; and, if you care to be just, it is not me whom you will blame. I do not wish to offend you; but, with the reputation which



you have acquired, and which, by your own confession, is at least in part deserved, what woman could own to be in correspondence with you ? and what virtuous woman may determine to do something which she feels she will be obliged to conceal ?

Again, if I were assured that your letters would be of a kind of which I need never have to complain, so that I could always justify myself in my own eyes for having received them ! Perhaps then the desire of proving to you that it is reason and not hate which sways me would induce me to waive those powerful considerations, and to do much more than I ought, in allowing you sometimes to write to me. If indeed you desire to do so as much as you say, you will voluntarily submit to the one condition which could make me consent ; and if you have any gratitude for what I am now doing for you, you will not defer your departure.

Permit me to remark to you on this subject that you received a letter this morning, and that you have not taken advantage of it to announce your going to Madame de Rosemonde, as you had promised me. I hope that at present nothing need prevent you keeping your word. I count, above all, on your not waiting for the interview which you ask of me, and to which I absolutely decline to lend myself ; and I hope that, instead of the order which you pretend is necessary to you, you will content yourself with the prayer which I renew to you. Adieu, Monsieur.

At the Château de..., 27th August, 17..

## LETTER THE FORTY-FOURTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

Join in my joy, my lovely friend; I am beloved, I have triumphed over that rebellious heart. 'Tis in vain that it still dissimulates; my fortunate skill has surprised its secret. Thanks to my energetic pains, I know all that is of interest to me: since the night, the fortunate night of yesterday, I am once more in my element; I have resumed my existence; I have unveiled a double mystery of love and iniquity: I will delight in the one, I will avenge myself for the other; I will fly from pleasure to pleasure. The mere idea that I form of it transports me to such a degree that I have some difficulty in recalling my prudence; and I shall have some, perhaps, in putting order into this narrative [which I make for you. Let us try, however.

Yesterday, after I had written my letter to you, I received one from the celestial *dévoté*. I send it you; you will see in it that she gives me, with as little clumsiness as is possible, permission to write to her: but she urges on my departure; and I quite felt that I could not defer it too long without injuring myself.

Tormented, however, by the desire to know who could have written against me, I was still uncertain as to what course I should

take. I tried to win over the chambermaid and would fain persuade her to give up to me her mistress's pockets, which she could have easily laid hold of in the evening, and which she could have replaced in the morning, without exciting the least suspicion. I offered ten louis for this slight service : but I only found a baggage, scrupulous or afraid, whom neither my eloquence nor my money could vanquish. I was still preaching to her when the supper-bell rang. I was forced to leave her; only too glad that she was willing to promise me secrecy, on which you may judge I scarcely counted.

I had never been in a worse humour. I felt myself compromised and I reproached myself all the evening for my foolish attempt.

When I had retired, not without anxiety, I sent for my *chasseur*, who, in his quality of happy lover, ought to have some credit. I wanted him either to persuade this girl to do what I had asked of her, or at least to make sure of her discretion; but he, who ordinarily is afraid of nothing, seemed doubtful of the success of the negotiation, and made a reflexion on the subject the profundity of which amazed me.

"Monsieur surely knows better than I," said he, "that to lie with a girl is only to make her do what she likes to do: from that to making her do what we like is often a long way."

*Le bon sens du maraud quelquefois m'épouvante.*

"I can the less answer for her," he added, "because I have reason to believe she has a lover; and that I only owe her to the idleness of country life. So that, were it not for my zeal in Monsieur's service, I should not have had her but once." (He is a real treasure this fellow!) "As for secrecy," he went on, "what will be the good of making her promise it, since she will run no risk in deceiving us? To speak again to her about it would only be to let her know that it was important, and thus make her all the more eager to use it for making up to her mistress."

The more just these reflexions seemed to me, the more was my

embarrassment heightened. Luckily the knave was started off to gossip; and as I had need of him, I let him run on. While he was relating to me his adventures with this wench, I learned that, as the chamber which she occupied was only separated from that of her mistress by a bare partition, through which any suspicious noise could be heard, it was in his own that they met every night. At once, I formed my plan; I communicated it to him and we carried it out with success.

I waited until two o'clock in the morning; and then betook myself, as we had agreed, to the scene of the *rendez-vous*, carrying a light with me, and pretending that I had rung several times to no purpose. My confidant, who plays his parts to a marvel, went through a little scene of surprise, despair, and excuses, which I terminated by sending him to heat me some water, of which I feigned to have a need; whilst the scrupulous chamber-maid was all the more shamefaced, in that my rascal, wishing to improve on my projects, had induced her to make a toilette which the season suggested but did not excuse.

As I felt that the more this wench was humiliated, the more easily I should dispose of her, I allowed her to change neither her position nor her costume; and after ordering my valet to await me in my room, I sat down beside her on the bed, which was in great disorder, and commenced my conversation. I had need to maintain the control which the situation gave me over her; thus I preserved a coolness which would have done honour to the continence of Scipio; and without taking the slightest liberty with her—which, however, her freshness and the opportunity seemed to give her the right to expect—I spoke of business to her as calmly as I should have with a lawyer.

My conditions were that I would faithfully keep her secret, provided that, on the morrow, at about the same hour, she would hand me the pockets of her mistress. "Besides that," I added, "I offered you ten louis yesterday; I promise you them again to-day.

I do not want to take advantage of your situation." Everything was granted, as you may well believe; I then withdrew, and allowed the happy couple to make up for lost time.

I spent mine in sleep; and, on my awakening, desiring to have a pretext for not replying to my fair one's letter before I had investigated her papers, which I could not do until the ensuing night, I resolved to go out shooting, which I did for the greater part of the day.

On my return, I was received coldly enough. I had a mind to believe that we were a little offended at the small zeal I had shown in not profiting by the time that was left, especially after the much kinder letter which she had written me. I judge so from the fact that Madame de Rosemonde, having addressed me some reproaches for this long absence, my beauty remarked with a tone of acrimony, "Ah! do not let us reproach M. de Valmont for giving himself up to the one pleasure which he can find here." I murmured at this injustice, and took advantage of it to vow that I took so much pleasure in the ladies' society that I was sacrificing for them a most interesting letter which I had to write. I added that, being unable to sleep for some nights past, I had wished to try if fatigue would restore it me; and my eyes were sufficiently explicit, both as to the subject of my letter and the cause of my insomnia. I was at pains to wear all that evening a manner of melancholy sweetness, which seemed to sit on me well enough, and which masked the impatience I was in to see the hour arrive which was to deliver me the secret so obstinately withheld from me. At last we separated, and, some time afterwards, the faithful chambermaid came to bring me the price agreed upon for my discretion.

Once master of this treasure, I proceeded to the inventory with that prudence which you know I possess: for it was important to put back everything in its place. I fell at first upon two letters from the husband—an undigested mixture of details of law-suits and effusions of conjugal love, which I had the patience to read in

their entirety, and where I found no word that had any relation to myself. I replaced them with temper: but this was soothed when my hand lighted upon the pieces of my famous Dijon letter, carefully put together. Luckily the whim seized me to run through it. Judge of my joy when I perceived very distinct traces of my adorable *dévoté's* tears. I confess, I gave way to an impulse of youth, and kissed this letter with a transport of which I had not believed myself any longer capable. I continued my happy examination; I found all my letters in sequence and order of date; and what gave me a still more agreeable surprise was to find the first of all, the one which I thought the graceless creature had returned to me, faithfully copied by her hand, and in an altered and tremulous hand, ample witness to the soft perturbation of her heart during that employment.

Thus far I was entirely given over to love; soon it gave place to fury. Who do you think it is, that wishes to ruin me in the eyes of the woman whom I adore? What Fury do you suppose is vile enough to plot such a black scheme? You know her: it is your friend, your kinswoman; it is Madame de Volanges. You cannot imagine what a tissue of horrors this infernal Megæra has written concerning me. It is she, she alone, who has troubled the security of this angelic woman; it is through her counsels, through her pernicious advice, that I see myself forced to leave; it is she, in short, who has sacrificed me. Ah! without a doubt her daughter must be seduced: but that is not enough, she must be ruined; and, since this cursed woman's age puts her beyond the reach of my assaults, she must be hit in the object of her affections.

So she wishes me to come back to Paris! she forces me to it! be it so, I will go back; but she shall bewail my return. I am annoyed that Danceny is the hero of that adventure; he possesses a fundamental honesty which will embarrass us: however, he is in love, and I see him often; perhaps one may make use of him. I am losing sight of myself in my anger, and forgetting that I

owe you an account of what has passed to-day. To resume.

This morning I saw my sensitive prude again. Never had I found her so lovely. It must ever be so: a woman's loveliest moment, the only one when she can produce that intoxication of the soul of which we speak so constantly and which we so rarely meet, is that one when, assured of her love, we are not yet of her favours; and that is precisely the case in which I find myself now. Perhaps too, the idea that I was going to be deprived of the pleasure of seeing her served to beautify her. Finally, with the arrival of the postman, I was handed your letter of the 27th; and whilst I read it, I was still hesitating as to whether I should keep my word: but I met my beauty's eyes, and it would have been impossible to me to refuse her aught.

I then announced my departure. A moment later, Madame de Rosemonde left us alone: but I was still four paces away from the coy creature when, rising with an affrighted air: "Leave me, leave me, Monsieur," she said; "in God's name, leave me."

This fervent prayer, which betrayed her emotion, could not but animate me the more. I was already at her side, and I held her hands which she had joined together with a quite touching expression; I was beginning some tender complaints, when some hostile demon brought back Madame de Rosemonde. The timid *dévoté*, who had, in truth, some cause for fear, took advantage of this to withdraw.

I offered her my hand, however, which she accepted; and auguring well from this mildness, which she had not shown for a long time, I sought to press hers, whilst again commencing my complaints. At first she would fain withdraw it; but at my more lively insistence, she abandoned it with a good grace, although without replying either to the gesture or to my remarks. Arrived before the door of her apartment, I wished to kiss this hand, before I dropped it. The defence began by being hearty: but a "remember that I am going away," uttered most tenderly, rendered it awkward

and inefficient. Hardly had the kiss been given, when the hand found strength enough to escape, and the fair one entered her apartment, where her chamber maid was in attendance. Here finishes my history.

As I presume that to-morrow you will be at the Maréchale's, where I certainly shall not go to look for you; as I think it very likely too that, at our first interview, we shall have more than one affair to discuss, and notably that of the little Volanges, whom I do not lose sight of, I have decided to have myself preceded by this letter, and, long as it is, I shall not close it, until the moment comes for sending it to the post; for, at the point which I have reached, everything may depend on an opportunity, and I leave you now to see if there be one.

P. S. *Eight o'clock in the evening.*

Nothing fresh; not the least little moment of liberty: care taken even to avoid it. However, at least as much sorrow shown as decency permits. Another incident which cannot be without consequences is that I am charged by Madame de Rosemonde with an invitation to Madame de Volanges to come and spend some time with her in the country.

Adieu, my lovely friend; until to-morrow, or the day after, at the latest.

At the Château de..., 28th August, 1777.



## LETTER THE FORTY-FIFTH

### *The Présidente de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges*

**M** DE VALMONT left this morning, Madame; you seemed to me so anxious for his departure, that I thought I ought to inform you of it. Madame de Rosemonde much regrets her nephew, whose society, one must admit, is agreeable: she passed the whole morning in talking of him, with that sensibility which you know her to possess; she did not stint his praises. I thought it was incumbent on me to listen to her without contradiction, more especially as I must confess that on many points she was right. In addition, I felt that I had to reproach myself with being the cause of this separation, and I cannot hope to be able to compensate her for the pleasure of which I have deprived her. You know that I have by nature small store of gaiety, and the kind of life we are going to lead here is not formed to increase it.

If I had not acted according to your advice, I should fear that I had behaved somewhat lightly; for I was really distressed at my venerable friend's grief; she touched me to such a degree that I could have willingly mingled my tears with her own.

We live at present in the hope that you will accept the invitation which M. de Valmont is to bring you, on the part of Madame de

Rosemonde, to come and spend some time with her. I hope that you have no doubt of the pleasure it will give me to see you; and, in truth, you owe us this recompense. I shall be most delighted to have this opportunity of making an earlier acquaintance with Mademoiselle de Volanges, and to have the chance of convincing you more and more of the respectful sentiments, etc.

At the Château de... , 20th August, 17..

## LETTER THE FORTY-SIXTH

*The Chevalier Danceny to Cécile Volanges.*

**W**HAT has happened to you then, my adored Cécile? What can have caused in you so sudden and cruel an alteration? What has become of your vows of never changing? It was only yesterday that you repeated them with so much pleasure! Who can have made you forget them to-day? It is useless for me to examine myself; I cannot find the cause of it in me; and it is terrible that I should have to seek it in you. Ah! doubtless you are neither light nor deceitful; and even in this moment of despair, no insulting suspicion shall defile my soul. Yet, by what fatality comes it that you are no longer the same? No, cruel one, you are no longer the same! The tender Cécile, the Cécile whom I adore, and whose vows I have received, would not have avoided my gaze, would not have resisted the happy chance which placed me beside her; or, if any reason which I cannot understand had forced her to treat me with such severity, she would, at least, have condescended to inform me of it.

Ah, you do not know, you will never know, my Cécile, all that you have made me suffer to-day, all that I suffer still at this moment. Do you suppose then that I can live, if I am no longer

loved by you ? None the less, when I asked you for a word, one single word to dispel my fears, instead of answering me you pretended to be afraid of being overheard ; and that difficulty which did not then exist, you immediately brought about yourself by the place which you chose in the circle. When, compelled to leave you, I asked you at what hour I could see you again to-morrow, you pretended that you could not say, and Madame de Volanges had to be my informant. Thus the moment, ever desired so fondly, which is to bring me into your presence, to-morrow, will only excite in me anxiety ; and the pleasure of seeing you, hitherto so dear to my heart, will give place to the fear of being intrusive.

I feel it already, this dread irks me, and I dare not speak to you of my love. That *I love you*, which I loved so well to repeat when I could hear it in my turn ; that soft phrase which sufficed for my felicity, offers me, if you are changed, no more than the image of an eternal despair. I cannot believe, however, that that talisman of love has lost all its power, and I am fain to employ it once more. Yes, my Cécile, *I love you*. Repeat after me then this expression of my happiness. Remember that you have accustomed me to the hearing of it, and that to deprive me of it is to condemn me to a torture which, like my love, can only end with my life.

Paris, 29th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FORTY-SEVENTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

**T**ODAY again I shall not see you, my lovely friend, and here are my reasons, which I beg you to meet with indulgence.

Instead of returning here directly, I stopped with the Comtesse de \*\*\* , whose *chateau* lay almost upon my road, and of whom I asked a dinner. I did not reach Paris until 'about seven o'clock, and I alighted at the Opera, where I hoped to find you.

The Opera over, I went to see my fair friends of the green-room; I found there my whilom *Émilie*, surrounded by a numerous court, women as well as men, to whom she was offering a supper that very evening at P——. I had no sooner entered this assemblage than I was invited to the supper by acclamation. I also received one from a little fat and stumpy person, who stammered his invitation to me in the French of Holland, and whom I recognized as the true hero of the *fête*. I accepted.

I learned upon my way that the house whither we were going was the price agreed upon for *Émilie's* favours towards this grotesque figure, and that this supper was a veritable wedding-breakfast. The little man could not contain himself for joy, in expectation of the pleasure which awaited him; he seemed to me

so satisfied with the prospect that he gave me a longing to disturb it; which was, effectually, what I did.

The only difficulty I found was that of persuading Émilie, who was rendered somewhat scrupulous by the burgomaster's wealth. She agreed, however, after raising some objections, to the plan which I suggested of filling this little beer-barrel with wine, and so putting him *hors de combat* for the rest of the night.

The sublime idea which we had formed of a Dutch toper caused us to employ all available means. We succeeded so well that, at dessert, he was already without the strength to lift his glass: but the helpful Émilie and myself vied with one another in filling him up. Finally, he fell beneath the table, in so drunken a state, that it ought to last for at least a week. We then decided to send him back to Paris; and, as he had not kept his carriage, I had him carried into mine, and remained in his stead. I thereupon received the congratulations of the company, which soon afterwards retired, and left me in possession of the field. This gaiety, and perhaps my long rustication, made Émilie seem so desirable to me that I promised to stay with her until the Dutchmans's resurrection.

This complaisance on my part is the price of that which she has just shown me, that of serving me for a desk upon which to write to my fair puritan, to whom I found it amusing to send a letter written in the bed, and almost in the arms, of a wench, a letter interrupted even to complete an infidelity, in which I send her an exact account of my position and my conduct. Émilie, who has read the epistle, laughed like a mad girl over it, and I hope that you will laugh as well.

As my letter must needs bear the Paris post-mark, I send it to you; I leave it open, Will you please read it, seal it up, and commit it to the post. Above all, be careful not to employ your own seal, nor even any amorous device; a simple head. Adieu, my lovely friend.

P. S. I open my letter ; I have persuaded Emilie to go to the *Italians*.... I shall take advantage of that moment to come and see you. I shall be with you by six o'clock at the latest ; and if it be agreeable to you, we will go together, about seven o'clock, to Madame de Volanges. Propriety commands that I do not postpone the invitation with which I am charged for her from Madame de Rosemonde ; moreover, I shall be delighted to see the little Volanges. .

Adieu, most fair lady, I shall be as pleased to embrace you, as the Chevalier will be jealous.

At P..., 30th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FORTY-EIGHTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel.*

(Bearing the postmark of Paris)

**I**T is after a stormy night, during which I have not closed my eyes; it is after having been ceaselessly either in the agitation of a devouring ardour, or in an utter annihilation of all the faculties of my soul, that I come to seek with you, Madame, the calm of which I have need, and which, however, I have as yet no hope to enjoy. In truth, the situation in which I am, whilst writing to you, makes me realize more than ever the irresistible power of love; I can hardly preserve sufficient control over myself to put some order into my ideas; and I foresee already that I shall not finish this letter without being forced to interrupt it. What! Am I never to hope then that you will some day share with me the trouble which overcomes me at this moment? I dare believe, notwithstanding, that if you were well acquainted with it, you would not be entirely insensible. Believe me, Madame, a cold tranquillity, the soul's slumber, the imitation of death do not conduce to happiness; the active passions alone can lead us thither; and, in spite of the torments which you make me suffer, I think I can assure you without risk that at this moment I am happier than you. In vain do



you overwhelm me with your terrible severities; they do not prevent me from abandoning myself utterly to love, and forgetting, in the delirium which it causes me, the despair into which you cast me. It is so that I would avenge myself for the exile to which you condemn me. Never had I so much pleasure in writing to you; never have I experienced, during such an occupation, an emotion so sweet and, at the same time, so lively. Everything seems to enhance my transports; the air I breathe is laden with pleasure; the very table upon which I write, to you, consecrated for the first time to this office, becomes love's sacred altar to me; how much it will be beautified in my eyes! I shall have traced upon it the vow to love you for ever! Pardon, I beseech you, the disorder of my senses. Perhaps, I ought to abandon myself less to transports which you do not share: I must leave you for a moment to dispel an intoxication which increases each moment, and which becomes stronger than myself.

I return to you, Madame, and doubtless, I return always with the same eagerness. However, the sentiment of happiness has fled far away from me; it has given place to that of cruel privation. What does it avail me to speak of my sentiments, if I seek in vain the means to convince you of them? After so many efforts, I am equally bereft of strength and confidence. If I still tell over to myself the pleasures of love, it is only to feel more keenly my sorrow at being deprived of them. I see no other resource, save in your indulgence; and I am too sensible at this moment of how greatly I need it, to hope to obtain it. Never, however, has my love been more respectful, never could it be less likely to offend you; it is of such a kind, I dare say, as the most severe virtue need not fear: but I am myself afraid of describing to you, at greater length, the sorrow which I experience. Assured as I am that the object which causes it does not participate in it, I must at any rate not abuse your kindness; and it would be to do that, were I to spend more time in retracing for you that dolorous picture. I take

only enough to beg you to reply to me, and never to doubt of the sincerity of my sentiments.

Written at P...; dated from Paris, 30th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FORTY-NINTH

*Gécile Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny.*

**W**ITHOUT being either false or frivolous, Monsieur, it is enough for me to be enlightened as to my conduct, to feel the necessity of altering it; I have promised this sacrifice to God, until such a time when I can offer Him also that of my sentiments towards you, which are rendered even more criminal by the religious character of your estate. I feel certain that it will only bring me sorrow, and I will not even hide from you that, since the day before yesterday, I have wept every time I have thought of you. But I hope that God will do me the grace of giving me the needful strength to forget you, as I ask of Him morning and evening. I expect also of your friendship and of your honour that you will not seek to shake me in the good resolution which has been inspired in me, and in which I strive to maintain myself. In consequence, I beg you to have the kindness to write no more to me, the more so as I warn you that I should no longer reply to you, and that you would compel me to acquaint Mamma with all that has passed; and that would deprive me entirely of the pleasure of seeing you.

I shall, none the less, retain for you all the attachment which one may have without there being harm in it; and it is indeed

with all my soul that I wish you every kind of happiness. I quite feel that you will no longer love me as much as you did, and that, perhaps, you will soon love another better than me. But that will be one penance the more for the fault which I have committed in giving you my heart, which I ought to give only to God and my husband when I have one. I hope that the Divine mercy will take pity on my weakness, and that it will give me no more sorrow than I am able to support.

Adieu, Monsieur; I can truly assure you that, if I were permitted to love anybody, I should never love anybody but you. But that is all I may say to you; and perhaps even that is more than I ought to say.

Paris, 31th August, 17<sup>th</sup>

## LETTER THE FIFTIETH

*The Présidente de Tourvel to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**I**s it thus then, Monsieur, that you carry out the conditions upon which I consented sometimes to receive your letters? And have I *no reason for complaint* when you speak to me of a sentiment to which I should still fear to abandon myself, even if I could do so without violating all my duties? For the rest, if I had need of fresh reasons to preserve this salutary dread, it seems to me that I could find them in your last letter. In effect, at the very moment when you think to make an apology for love, what else are you doing but revealing to me its redoubtable storms? Who can wish for happiness bought at the expense of reason, whose short-lived pleasures are followed at any rate by regret, if not by remorse?

You yourself, in whom the habit of this dangerous delirium ought to diminish it's effect, are you not, however, compelled to confess that it often becomes stronger than yourself; and are you not the first to lament the involuntary trouble which it causes you? What fearful ravages then would it not effect on a fresh and sensitive heart, which would still augment its empire, by the sacrifices it would be forced to make to it?

You believe, Monsieur, or you feign to believe that love leads

to happiness; and I—I am so convinced that it would render me unhappy that I would not even hear its name pronounced. It seems to me that only to speak of it destroys tranquillity; and it is as much from inclination as from duty that I beg you to be good enough to keep silence on this subject.

After all, this request should be very easy for you to grant me at present. Returned to Paris, you will find there occasions enough to forget a sentiment which, perhaps, only owed its birth to the habit you are in of occupying yourself with such subjects, and its strength to the idleness of country life. Are you not then in that town where you had seen me with so much indifference? Can you take a step there without encountering an example of your readiness to change? And are you not surrounded there by women who, all more amiable than myself, have better right to your homage?

I am without the vanity with which my sex is reproached; I have still less of that false modesty which is nothing but a refinement of pride; and it is with the utmost good faith that I tell you here, I know how few pleasing qualities I possess: had I all there were, I should not believe them sufficient to retain you. To ask you then to occupy yourself no longer with me is only to beg you to do to-day what you had already done before, and what you would most assuredly do again in a short time, even if I were to ask the contrary.

This truth, which I do not lose sight of, would be, itself, a reason strong enough to disincline me to listen to you. I have still thousand others, but without entering upon a long discussion, I confine myself to begging you, as I have done before, to correspond with me no further upon a sentiment to which I must not listen, and to which I ought even less to reply.

At the Château de . . . , 1st September, 1777.

## LETTER THE FIFTY-FIRST

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**R**EALLY, Vicomte. you are insupportable. You treat me as lightly as though I were your mistress. Do you know that I shall get angry, and that at the present moment I am in a fearful temper? Why! you have to see Danceny to-morrow morning; you know how important it is that I should speak to you before that interview; and without troubling yourself any more about it, you keep me waiting all day to run off I know not where. You are the cause of my arriving at Madame de Volanges' *indecently* late, and of my being found *surprising* by all the old women. I was obliged to flatter them during the whole of the evening in order to appease them: for one must never annoy the old women; it is they who make the young ones' reputations.

It is now one o'clock in the morning; and instead of going to bed, which I am dying to do, I must needs write you a long letter, which will make me twice as sleepy from the *ennui* it causes me. You are most fortunate that I have not time to scold you further. Do not believe for that reason that I forgive you: it is only that I am pressed for time. Listen to me then, I hasten to come to the point.

However little skill you may exert, you are bound to-morrow to have Danceny's confidence. The moment is favourable for confidence: it is the moment of unhappiness. The little girl has been to confession: like a child, she has told everything; and ever since she has been tormented to such a degree by the fear of the devil that she insists on breaking it off. She related to me all her little scruples with a vivacity which told me how excited she was. She showed me her letter announcing the rupture, which was a real sermon. She babbled for an hour to me, without uttering one word of common sense. But she embarrassed me none the less; for you can imagine that I could not risk opening my mind to such a wrong-headed creature.

I saw, however, through all this verbiage, that she is as fond of her Danceny as ever; I even remarked one of those resources which love never fails to find, and of which the little girl is an amusing dupe. Tormented by her desire to occupy herself with her lover, and by the fear of being damned if she does so, she has invented the plan of praying God that she may be able to forget him; and as she repeats this prayer at every moment of the day, she finds a means thereby of thinking of him unceasingly.

With any more *experienced* than Danceny, this little incident would perhaps be more favourable than the reverse; but the young man is so much of a Céladon that, if we do not help him, he will require so much time to overcome the slightest obstacles that there will be none left for us to carry out our project.

You are quite right. it is a pity, and I am as vexed as you, that he should be the hero of this adventure: but what would you have? What is done is done, and it is your fault, I asked to see his reply; it was really pitiful. He produces arguments till he is out of breath, to prove to her that an involuntary sentiment cannot be a crime: as if it did not cease to be involuntary once one ceases to fight against it! That idea is so simple that it even suggested itself to the little girl. He complains of his unhappiness in a manner



that is touching enough : but his grief is so gentle, and seems so strong and so sincere, that it seems to me impossible that a woman who finds occasion to reduce a man to such a degree of despair, and with so little danger, is not tempted to get rid of her fancy. Finally he explains that he is not a monk, as the little one believed ; and that is, without contradiction, the best thing he has done : for, if it is a question of going so far as to abandon yourself to monastic loves, it is assuredly not the Knights of Malta who would deserve the preference.

Be that as it may, instead of wasting time in arguments which would have compromised me, perhaps without convincing, I approved her project of rupture ; but I said that it was nicer, in such a case, to tell your reasons rather than to write them ; that it was customary also to return letters and any other trifles one might have received ; and appearing thus to enter into the views of the little person, I persuaded her to grant an interview to Danceny. We formed our plans on the spot, and I charged myself with the task of persuading the mother to go abroad without her daughter ; it is to-morrow afternoon that this decisive moment will take place. Danceny is already informed of it ; but for God's sake, if you get an opportunity, please persuade this pretty swain to be less languorous, and teach him—since he must be told everything—that the true fashion to overcome scruples is to leave nothing to be lost by those who possess them.

For the rest, in order to save a repetition of this ridiculous scene, I did not fail to exite certain doubts in the little girl's mind, as to the discretion of confessors ; and I assure you, she is paying now for the fright which she gave me, by her terror lest hers should go and tell everything to her mother. I hope that, after I have talked once or twice more with her, she will give up going thus to tell her follies to the first comer.

Adieu, Vicomte ; take charge of Danceny and guide his way. It would be shameful if we could not do what we will with two

children. If we find it more difficult than we had thought at first, let us reflect, to animate our zeal—you, that it is the daughter of Madame de Volanges who is in question, I, that she is destined to become the wife of Gercourt. Adieu.

Paris, 15th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FIFTY-SECOND

### *The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel*

**Y**ou forbid me, Madame, to speak to you of my love ; but where am I to find the necessary courage to obey you ? Solely occupied by a sentiment which should be so sweet, and which you render so cruel ; languishing in the exile to which you have condemned me ; living only on privations and regrets ; a prey to torments all the more dolourous in that they remind me unceasingly of your indifference ; must I lose the only consolation which remains to me ? And can I have any other, save that of sometimes laying bare to you a soul which you fill with trouble and bitterness ? Will you avert your gaze, that you may not see the tears you cause to flow ? Will you refuse even the homage of the sacrifices you demand ? Would it not be worthier of you, of your good and gentle soul, to pity an unhappy one who is only rendered so by you, rather than to seek to aggravate his pain by a refusal which is at once unjust and rigorous ?

You pretend to be afraid of love, and you will not see that you alone are the cause of the evils with which you reproach it. Ah, no doubt, the sentiment is painful, when the object which inspires it does not reciprocate ; but where is happiness to be found, if mutual

love does not procure it? Tender friendship, sweet confidence—the only one which is without reserve—sorrow's alleviation, pleasure's augmentation, hope's enchantment, the delights of remembrance: where find them else than in love? You calumniate it, you who, in order to enjoy all the good which it offers you, have but to give up resisting it; and I—I forget the pain which I experience in undertaking its defence.

You force me also to defend myself; for, whereas I consecrate my life to your adoration, you pass yours in seeking reason to blame me: already you have assumed that I am frivolous and a deceiver; and, taking advantage of certain errors which I myself have confessed to you, you are pleased to confound the man I was then with what I am at present. Not content with abandoning me to the torment of living away from you, you add to that a cruel banter as to pleasures to which you know how you have rendered me insensible. You do not believe either in my promises or my oaths: well! there remains one guarantee for me to offer you, which you will not suspect. It is yourself. I only ask you to question yourself in all good faith: if you do not believe in my love, if you doubt for a moment that you reign supreme in my heart, if you are not sure that you have fixed this heart, which, indeed, has thus far been too fickle, I consent to bear the penalty of this error; I shall suffer, but I will not appeal: but if, on the contrary, doing justice to us both, you are forced to admit to yourself that you have not, will never have a rival, ask me no more, I beg you, to fight with chimeras, and leave me at least the consolation of seeing you no longer in doubt as to a sentiment which *indeed*, will not finish, cannot finish, but with my life. Permit me, Madame, to beg you to reply positively to this part of my letter.

If, however, I give up that period of my life which seems to damage me so severely in your eyes, it is not because, in case of need, reasons had failed me to defend it.

What have I done, after all, but fail to resist the vortex into

which I was thrown? Entering the world, young and without experience; passed, so to speak, from hand to hand by a crowd of women, who all hasten to forestall, by their good-nature, a reflexion which they feel cannot but be unfavourable to them; was it my part then to set the example of a resistance which was never opposed to me? Or was I to punish myself for a moment of error, which was often provoked, by a constancy undoubtedly useless, and which would only have excited ridicule? Nay, what other cause, save a speedy rupture, can justify a shameful choice?

But, I can say it, this intoxication of the senses, perhaps even this delirium of vanity, did not attain to my heart. Born for love, intrigue might distract it, but did not suffice to occupy it; surrounded by seducing but despicable objects, none of them reached as far as my soul: I was offered pleasures, I sought for virtues; and in short, I even thought myself inconstant because I was delicate and sensitive.

It was when I saw you that I saw light: soon I understood that the charin of love sprang from the qualities of the soul; that they alone could cause its excess, and justify it. I felt, in short, that it was equally impossible for me not to love you, or to love any other than you.

There, Madame, is the heart to which you fear to trust yourself, and on whose fate you have to pronounce: but whatever may be the destiny you reserve for it, you will change nothing of the sentiments which attach it to you; they are as inalterable as the virtues which have given them birth.

Paris, 3rd September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FIFTY-THIRD

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

I HAVE seen Danceny, but only obtained his half-confidence; he insists especially on suppressing the name of the little Volanges, of whom he only spoke to me as a woman of great virtue, even somewhat a *dévoté* : apart from that, he gave me a fairly veracious account of his adventure, particularly the last incident. I excited him as best I could, I bantered him greatly upon his delicacy and scruples; but it seems that he clings to them, and I cannot answer for him: for the rest, I shall be able to tell you more after to-morrow. I am taking him to-morrow to Versailles, and I will occupy myself by studying him on the road. The interview which is to take place to-day also gives me some hope : everything may have happened to our satisfaction; and perhaps there is nothing left for us at present but to obtain a confession and collect the proofs. This task will be easier for you than for me: for the little person is more confiding or, what comes to the same thing, more talkative than her discreet lover. However, I will do my utmost.

Adieu, my lovely friend; I am in a mighty hurry; I shall not see you this evening, nor to-morrow: if you, on your side, know anything, write me a word on my return. I shall certainly come back to sleep in Paris.

At . . . , 3rd September, in the evening.

## LETTER THE FIFTY-FOURTH

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**O**n yes, it is certainly with Danceny that there is something to discover! If he told you so, he was boasting. I know nobody so stupid in an affair of love, and I reproach myself more and more with the kindness we have shown him. Do you know that yesterday I thought I was compromised through him. And it would have been a pure loss! Oh, I will have my revenge, I promise you.

When I arrived yesterday to fetch Madame de Volanges, she no longer wanted to go out; she felt indisposed; I had need of all my eloquence to persuade her, and I foresaw that Danceny might arrive before our departure, which would have been all the more awkward, as Madame de Volanges had told him the day before that she would not be at home. Her daughter and I were on thorns. At last we went out; and the little one pressed my hand so affectionately as she bid me adieu that, in spite of her intended rupture, with which she believed herself, in all good faith, still to be occupied, I prophesied wonders in the course of the evening.

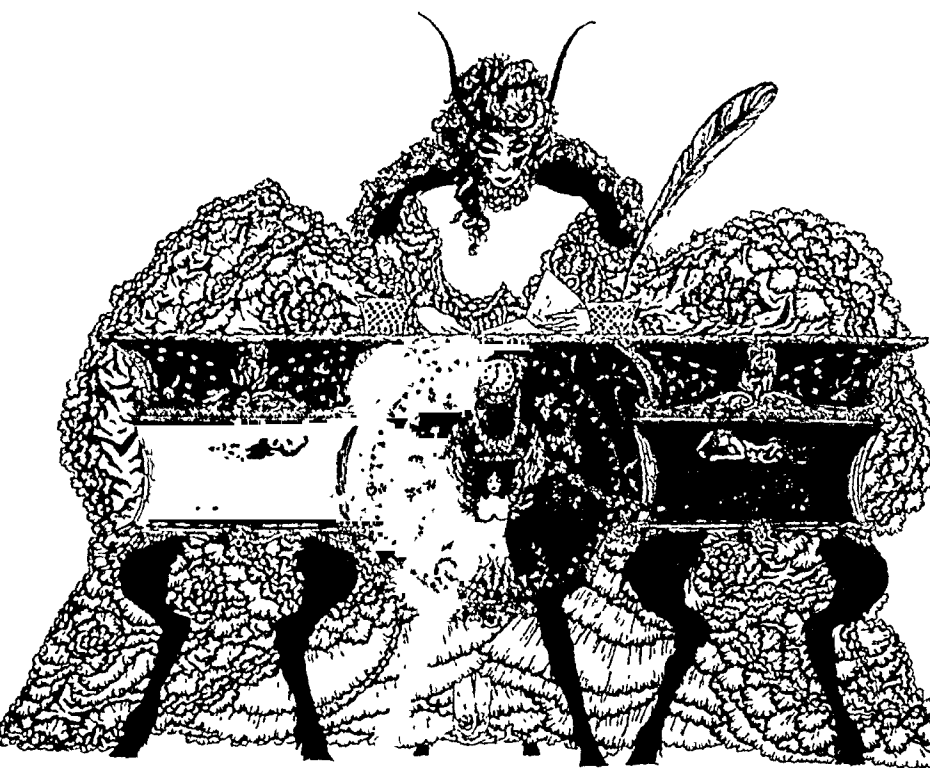
I was not at the end of my anxieties. We had hardly been half an hour at Madame de \*\*\*'s, when Madame de Volanges felt really unwell, and naturally she wanted to return home: as for me, I was

the less inclined for it in that I was afraid, supposing we were to surprise the young people (as the chances were we should), that my efforts to make the mother go abroad might seem highly suspicious. I adopted the course of frightening her upon her health, which luckily is not difficult; and I kept her for an hour and a half, without consenting to drive her home, by feigning fear at the consequences of the dangerous motion of the carriage. From the shame-faced air which I remarked on our arrival, I confess I hoped that at least my trouble had not been wasted.

The desire I had for further information made me stay with Madame de Volanges; who went to bed at once: and after having supped at her bed-side, we left her at an early hour, under the pretext that she had need of repose, and passed into her daughter's apartment. The latter had done, on her side, all that I had expected of her; vanished scruples, fresh vows of eternal love, etc., etc.: in a word, she had performed properly. But the fool, Danceny, had not by one point passed the line where he had been before. Oh! one can safely quarrel with such a one: reconciliations are not dangerous.

The child assures me, however, that he wanted more, but that she knew how to defend herself. I would wager that she brags, or that she excuses him; indeed I made almost certain of it. The fantasy seized me to find out how much one might rely on the defence of which she was capable; and I, a mere woman, bit by bit, excited her to the point.... In short, you may believe me, no one was ever more susceptible to a surprise of the senses. She is really lovable, this dear child! She deserves a different lover; she shall have at least a firm friend, for I am becoming really fond of her. I have promised her that I will form her, and I think I shall keep my word. I have often felt a need of having a woman in my confidence, and I should prefer her to another; but I can do nothing so long as she is not—what she needs to be; and that is one reason the more for bearing a grudge against Danceny.





Adieu, Vicomte ; do not come to me to-morrow, unless it be in the forenoon. I have yielded to the entreaties of the Chevalier, for an evening at the *petite maison*.

Paris, 4th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FIFTY-FIFTH

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay.*

**Y**ou were right, my dear Sophie; your prophesies succeed better than your advice. Danceny, as you had predicted, has been stronger than my confessor, than you, than myself; and here we are returned precisely to our old position. Ah! I do not repent it; and if you scold me, it will be only because you do not know the pleasure of loving Danceny. It is very easy to say what one ought to do, nothing prevents you; but if you had any experience of how we suffer from the pain of somebody we love, of the way in which his pleasure becomes our own, of how difficult it is to say no, when what we wish to say is yes, you would be astonished at nothing: I myself, who have felt it, felt it most keenly, do not yet understand it. Do you suppose, for instance that I could see Danceny weep, without weeping myself? I assure you that that would be utterly impossible to me; and, when he is happy, I am as happy as he. You may say what you like: what one says does not change things from what they are, and I am very certain that it is like that.

I should like to see you in my place.... No, it is not that I wish to say, for certainly I should not like to change places with anyone: but I wish that you too loved somebody, not only because then you

would understand me better and scold me less; but also because you would be happier, or, I should rather say, you would only then begin to know happiness.

Our amusements, our merriment—all that, you see, is only child's play: nothing is left, when once it is over. But love, ah, love! . . . . a word, a look, only to know he is there—that is happiness! When I see Danceny, I ask for nothing more; when I cannot see him, I ask only for him. I do not know how this is; but it would seem as though everything which I like resembles him. When he is not with me, I dream of him; and when I can dream of him utterly, without distraction, when I am quite alone, for instance, I am still happy; I close my eyes, and suddenly I think I see him; I remember his conversation, it causes me to sigh; and then I feel a fire, an agitation . . . I cannot keep in one place. It is like a torrent, and this torment gives me an unutterable pleasure.

I even think that when once one has been in love, the effect of it is shed even over friendship. That which I bear for you has not changed however; it is always as it was at the convent: but what I tell you of I feel for Madame de Merteuil. It seems as though I love her more as I do Danceny than as yourself; and sometimes I wish that she were he. This is so, perhaps, because it is not a children's friendship like our own, or else because I see them so often together, which makes me deceive myself. Be that as it may, the truth is that, between the two of them, they make me very happy; and, after all, I do not think there is much harm in what I do. I would only ask to stay as I am; and it is only the idea of marriage which distresses me: for if M. de Gercourt is such a man as I am told, and I have no doubt of it, I do not know what will become of me. Adieu, my Sophie; I love you always most tenderly.

Paris, 4th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FIFTY-SIXTH

*The Présidente de Tourvel to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**H**ow, Monsieur, would the answer which you ask of me serve you? To believe in your sentiments would not that be one reason the more to fear them? And without attacking or defending their sincerity, does it not suffice, ought it not to suffice for yourself, to know that I will not and may not reply to them?

Supposing that you were to love me really (and it is only to prevent a return to this subject that I consent to the supposition), would the obstacles which separate us be less insurmountable? And should I have aught else to do, but to wish that you might soon conquer this love, and above all, to help you with all my power by hastening to deprive you of any hope? You admit yourself that *this sentiment is painful, when the object which inspires it does not reciprocate*. Now, you are thoroughly well aware that it is impossible for me to reciprocate; and even if this misfortune should befall me, I should be the more to be pitied, without making you any happier. I hope that you respect me enough, not to doubt of that for a moment. Cease then, I conjure you, cease from troubling a heart to which tranquillity is so necessary; do not force me to regret that I have known you.

Loved and esteemed by a husband whom I both love and respect my duty and my pleasure are centred in the same object. I am happy, I must be so. If pleasures more keen exist, I do not desire them; I would not know them. Can there be any that are sweeter than that of being at peace with one's self, of knowing only days that are serene, of sleeping without trouble and awaking without remorse? What you call happiness is but a tumult of the senses, a tempest of passions of which the mere view from the shore is terrible. Ah! why confront these tempests! How dare embark upon a sea covered with the *débris* of so many thousand shipwrecks? And with whom? No, Monsieur, I stay on the shore; I cherish the bonds which unite me to it. I would not break them if I could; were I not held by them, I should hasten to procure them.

Why attach yourself to my life? Why this obstinate resolve to fellow me? Your letters, which should be few, succeed each other with rapidity. They should be sensible, and you speak to me in them of nothing but your mad love. You besiege me with your idea, more than you did with your person. Removed in one form, you reproduce yourself under another. The things which I asked you not to say, you repeat only in another way. It pleases you to embarrass me with captious arguments; you shun my own. I do not wish to answer you, I will answer you no more.... How you treat the women whom you have seduced! With what contempt you speak of them! I would fain believe that some of them deserve it: but are they all then so despicable? Ah, doubtless, since they have violated their duties in order to give themselves up to a criminal love. From that moment they have lost everything, even the esteem of him for whom they have sacrificed everything. The punishment is just, but the mere idea makes one tremble. What matters it, after all? Why should I occupy myself with them or with you? By what right do you come to trouble my tranquillity? Leave me, see me no more; do not write to me again, I beg you; I

demand it of you. This letter is the last which you will receive from me.

At the Château de . . . , 5th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE FIFTY-SEVENTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

I FOUND your letter yesterday on my arrival. Your anger quite delighted me. You could not have had a more lively sense of Danceny's delinquencies, if they had been exercised against yourself. It is no doubt out of vengeance that you get his mistress into the habit of showing him slight infidelities; you are a very wicked person! Yes, you are charming, and I am not surprised that you are more irresistible than Danceny.

At last I know him by heart, this pretty hero of romance! He has no more secrets for me. I have told him so often that virtuous love was the supreme good, that one emotion was worth ten intrigues, that I was myself, at this moment, amorous and timid; he found in me, in short, a fashion of thinking so conformable with his own, that, in the enchantment which he felt at my candour, he told me everything and vowed me a friendship without reserve. We are no more advanced for that in our project.

At first, it seemed to me that he went on the theory that a young girl demands much more consideration than a woman, in that she has more to lose. He thinks, above all, that nothing can justify a man for putting a girl into the necessity of marrying him, or living



dishonoured, when the girl is far richer than the man, which is the case in which he finds himself. The mother's sense of security, the girl's candour, all this intimidates and arrests him. The difficulty would not be simply to dispute these arguments, however true they may be. With a little skill, and helped by passion, they would soon be destroyed; all the more, in that they tend to be ridiculous, and one would have the sanction of custom on one's side. But what hinders one from having any hold over him is that he is happy as he is. Indeed, if a first love appears generally more virtuous, and, as one says, purer; if, at least, its course is slower, it is not, as people think, from delicacy or shyness; it is that the heart, astonished at an unknown emotion, halts, so to speak, at every step, to relish the charm which it experiences, and that this charm is so potent over a young heart that it occupies it to such an extent that it is unmindful of every other pleasure. That is so true, that a libertine in love—if such may befall a libertine—becomes from that instant in less haste for pleasure; in fact, between Danceny's behaviour towards the little Volanges, and my own towards the more prudish Madame de Tourvel, there is but a shade of difference.

It would have needed, to warm our young man, more obstacles than he has encountered; above all, that there should have been need for more mystery, for mystery begets boldness. I am coming to believe that you have hurt us by serving him so well; your conduct would have been excellent with a man of *experience*, who would have only felt desires: but you might have foreseen that, with a young man who is honourable and in love, the greatest value of favours is that they should be the proof of love; and, consequently, that, the surer he were of being beloved, the less enterprising he would become. What is to be done at present? I know nothing; but I have no hope that the child will be caught before marriage, and we shall have wasted our time: I am sorry for it, but I see no remedy.

Whilst I am thus discoursing, you are doing better with your Chevalier. That reminds me that you have promised me an infidelity in my favour; I have your promise in writing, and I do not want it to be a dishonoured draft. I admit that the date of payment has not yet come; but it would be generous of you not to wait for that; and on my side, I would take charge of the interest. What do you say, my lovely friend? Are you not tired of your constancy? Is this Chevalier then such a miracle? Oh, give me my way; I will indeed compel you to admit that if you have found some merit in him, it is because you have forgotten me.

Farewell, my lovely friend; I embrace you with all the ardour of my desire; I defy all the kisses of the Chevalier to contain as much.

At . . ., 2th September, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE FIFTY-EIGHTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel.*

**P**RAY, Madame, how have I deserved the reproaches which you make me, and the anger which you display? The liveliest attachment and, withal, the most respectful, the most entire submission to your least wishes: there, in two words, is the history of my sentiments and my conduct. Oppressed by the pains of an unhappy love, I had no other consolation than that of seeing you; you bade me deprive myself of that; I obeyed you without permitting myself a murmur. As a reward for this sacrifice, you allowed me to write to you, and to-day you would rob me of that solitary pleasure. Shall I see it ravished from me without seeking to defend it? No, without a doubt: ah, how should it not be dear to my heart? It is the only one which remains to me, and I owe it to you.

My letters, you say, are too frequent! But reflect, I beseech you, that during the ten days of my exile, I have not passed one moment without thinking of you, and that yet you have only received two letters from me. *I only speak to you of my love!* Ah, what can I say, save that which I think? All that I could do was to weaken the expression of that; and you can believe me that I only let you see what it was impossible for me to hide.

Finally, you threaten me that you will no longer reply to me ! Thus, the man who prefers you to everybody, and who respects even more than he loves you : not content with treating him with severity, you would add to it your contempt ! And why these threats and this anger ? What need have you of them ? Are you not sure of being obeyed, even when your orders are unjust ? Is it possible for me then to dispute even one of your desires, have I not already proved it ? But will you abuse this empire which you have over me ? After having rendered me unhappy, after having become unjust, will you find it so easy then to enjoy that tranquillity which you assure me is so necessary to you ? Will you never say to yourself : he has made me mistress of his fate, and I have made him unhappy ? He implored my aid, and I looked at him without pity ? Do you know to what point my despair may carry me ? No. To be able to appreciate my sufferings, you would need to know the extent to which I love you, and you do not know my heart.

To what do you sacrifice me ? To chimerical fears. And who inspires them in you ? A man who adores you ; a man over whom you will never cease to hold an absolute empire. What do you fear, what can you fear, from a sentiment over which you will ever be mistress, to direct as you will ? But your imagination creates monsters for itself, and you attribute the fright which they cause you to love. A little confidence, and these phantoms will disappear.

A wise man said that, to dispel fears, it is almost always sufficient to penetrate into their causes. It is in love especially that this truth finds its application. Love, and your fears will vanish. In the place of objects which affright you, you will find a delicious emotion, a lover tender and submissive, and all your days, marked by happiness, will leave you no other regret than that of having lost any by indifference, I myself, since I repented of my errors and exist only for love, regret a time which I thought I had passed in pleasure ; and I feel that it lies with you alone to make

carefully preserves for the pleasure of his friends." Now you know I have certainly some rights over the woods in question; and I shall go and revisit them if I am of no use to you. Adieu; remember Danceny will be with me about four o'clock.

Paris, 8th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SIXTIETH

*The Chevalier Danceny to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

(Enclosed in the preceding letter)

Alas, Monsieur, I am in despair, I have lost all! I dare not confide in writing the secret of my woes: but I feel a need to unburden them in the ear of a sure and trusty friend. At what hour could I see you, and ask you for advice and consolation? I was so happy on the day when I opened my soul to you! Now, what a difference! All is changed with me. What I suffer on my own account is but the least part of my torments; my anxiety on behalf of a far dearer object, that is what I cannot support. Happier than I, you will be able to see her, and I count on your friendship not to refuse me this favour: but I must see you and instruct you. You will pity me, you will help me; I have no hope save in you. You are a man of sensibility, you know what love is, and you are the only one in whom I can confide; do not refuse me your aid.

Adieu, Monsieur; the only alleviation of my pain is the reflexion that such a friend as yourself is left to me. Let me know, I beg you, at what hour I can find you. If it is not this morning, I could like it to be early in the afternoon.

Paris, 8<sup>th</sup> September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SIXTY-FIRST

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay.*

**M**y dear Sophie, pity your Cécile, your poor Cécile; she is very unhappy? Mamma knows all. I cannot conceive how she has come to suspect anything; and yet, she has discovered everything. Yesterday evening, Mamma seemed indeed to be in a bad humour, but I did not pay much attention to it. I even, whilst waiting till her rubber was finished, talked quite gaily to Madame de Merteuil, who had supped here, and we spoke much of Danceny. I do not believe, however, that we were overheard. She went away and I retired to my room.

I was undressing when Mamma entered, and I sent away my maid; she asked me for the key of my desk. The tone in which she made this request caused me to tremble so that I could hardly stand. I made a pretence of being unable to find it; but at last I had to obey her. The first drawer which she opened was precisely that which contained the letters of the Chevalier Danceny. I was so confused that, when she asked me what it was, I did not know what to reply to her, except that it was nothing; but when I saw her begin to read the first which presented itself, I had barely time to sink into an arm-chair when I felt so ill that I swooned away.

As soon as I came to myself again, my mother, who had called my maid, withdrew, telling me to go to bed. She carried off all Danceny's letters. I tremble every time I reflect that I must appear before her again. I did naught but weep all the night through.

I write to you at dawn, in the hope that Joséphine will come. If I can speak with her alone, I shall ask her to take a short note I am going to write to Madame de Merteuil; if not, I will put it in your letter, and will you kindly send it, as if from yourself. It is only from her that I shall get any consolation. At least, we can speak of him, for I have no hope to see him again. I am very wretched! Perhaps she will be kind enough to take charge of a letter for Danceny. I dare not trust Joséphine for such a purpose, and still less my maid; for it is perhaps she who told my mother that I had letters in my desk.

I will not write to you at any greater length, because I wish to have time to write Madame de Merteuil and also to Danceny, to have my letter all ready, if she will take charge of it. After that I shall lie down again, so that they will find me in bed when they come into my room. I shall say that I am ill, so that I need not have to visit Mamma. It will not be a great falsehood: for indeed I suffer more than if I had the fever. My eyes burn from excessive weeping; and I have a weight on my chest which hinders me from breathing. When I think that I shall not see Danceny again, I wish that I were dead.

Adieu, my dear Sophie, I can say no more to you; my tears choke me.

Paris, 7th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.



## LETTER THE SIXTY-SECOND

*Madame de Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny*

AFTER having abused, Monsieur, a mother's confidence and the innocence of a child. you will doubtless not be surprised if you are no longer received in a house where you have responded to the marks of a most sincere friendship, by a forgetfulness of all that is fitting. I prefer to beg you not to call upon me again, than to give orders at the door, which would compromise all alike, by the remarks which the lackeys would not fail to make. I have a right to hope that you will not force me to have recourse to such a means. I warn you also that if you make in the future the least attempt to support my daughter in the folly into which you have beguiled her, an austere and eternal retreat shall shelter her from your pursuit. It is for you to decide, Monsieur, whether you will shrink as little from being the cause of her misery, as you have from attempting her dishonour. As for me, my choice is made, and I have acquainted her with it.

You will find enclosed the packet containing your letters. I reckon upon you to send me in return all those of my daughter, and to do your utmost to leave no trace of an incident the memory

of which I could not retain without indignation, she without shame, and you without remorse.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Paris, 7th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SIXTY-THIRD

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**I**NDEED, yes, I will explain Danceny's letter to you. The incident which caused him to write it is my handiwork, and it is, I think, my *chef-d'œuvre*. I wasted no time since your last letter, and I said with the Athenian architect, "What he has said, I will do."

It is obstacles then that this fine hero of romance needs, and he slumbers in felicity! Oh, let him look to me, I will give him some work: and if his slumber is going to be peaceful any longer, I am mistaken. Indeed, he had to be taught the value of time, and I flatter myself that by now he is regretting all he has lost. It were well also, said you, that he had need of more mystery: well, that need won't be lacking him now. I have this quality, I—that my mistakes have only to be pointed out to me; then I take no repose until I have retrieved them. Let me tell you now what I did.

When I returned home in the morning of the day before yesterday, I read your letter; I found it luminous. Convinced that you had put your finger on the cause of the evil, my sole concern now was to find a means of curing it. I commenced, however, by retiring to bed; for the indefatigable Chevalier had not let me sleep a moment, and I thought I was sleepy: but not at all; absorbed in

Danceny, my desire to cure him of his indolence, or to punish him for it, did not let me close an eye, and it was only after I had thoroughly completed my plan, that I could take two hours' rest.

I went that same evening to Madame de Volanges, and, according to my project, I told her confidentially that I felt sure a dangerous intimacy existed between her daughter and Danceny. This woman, who sees so clearly in your case, was so blind that she answered me at first that I was certainly mistaken, that her daughter was a child, etc., etc. I could not tell her all I knew; but I quoted certain looks and remarks *whereat my virtue and my friendship had taken alarm*. In short, I spoke almost as well as a *dévôte* would have done; and to strike the decisive blow, I went so far as to say that I thought I had seen a letter given and received. "That reminds me," I added, "one day she opened before me a drawer in her desk in which I saw a number of papers, which she doubtless preserves. Do you know if she has any frequent correspondence?" Here Madame de Volanges' face changed, and I saw some tears rise to her eyes. "I thank you, my kind friend," she said, as she pressed my hand; "I will clear this up."

After this conversation, which was too short to excite suspicion, I went over to the young person. I left her soon afterwards, to beg her mother not to compromise me in her daughter's eyes; she promised me this the more willingly, when I pointed out to her how fortunate it would be if the child were to take sufficient confidence in me to open her heart to me, and thus afford me the occasion of giving her *my wise counsels*. I feel certain that she will keep her promise, because she will doubtless seek to vaunt her penetration in her daughter's eyes. Thus I am authorized to maintain my friendly tone towards the child, without seeming false to Madame de Volanges, which I wished to avoid. I have also gained for the future the right to be as long and as privately as I like with the young person, without the mother being able to take umbrage.

I took advantage of this, that very evening; and when my game

was over, I took the child aside in a corner, and set her on the subject of Danceny, upon which she is inexhaustible. I amused myself by exciting her with the pleasure she will have when she sees him to-morrow; there is no kind of folly that I did not make her say. I needs must restore to her in hope what I had deprived her of in reality; and besides all that ought to render the blow more forcible, and I am persuaded that, the more she suffers, the greater will be her haste to compensate herself for it, on the next occasion, 'Tis wise, moreover, to accustom to great events anyone whom one destines for great adventures.

After all, may she not pay for the pleasure of having her Danceny with a few tears? She dotes on him! Well, I promise her that she shall have him, and even sooner than she would have done, but for this storm. It is like a bad dream, the awakening from which will be delicious; and, considerinh all, I think she owes me gratitude: after all, if I have pute a spice of malice into it, one must amuse oneself:

*“Les sots sont ici-bas pour nos menus-plaisirs”.*

I withdrew at last, thoroughly satisfied with myself. Either, said I to myself, Danceny's love, eyited by obstacles, will redouble in intensity, and then I shall serve him with all my power; or, if he is nothing but a fool, as I am sometimes tempted to believe, he will be in despair, and will look upon himself as beaten: now, in that case, I shall at least have been as well avenged on him as he has been on me; on my way, I shall have increased the mother's esteem for me, the daughter's friendship, and the confidence of both. As for Gercourt, the first object of my care, I should be very unlucky, or very clumsy, if, mistress over his bride's mind, as I am, and as I intend to be even more, I did not find a thousand ways of making him what I mean him to be. I went to bed with these pleasant thoughts: I slept well, too, and awote very late.

On my awakening I found two letters, one from the mother and one from the daughter; and I could not refrain from laughing when

I encountered, in both, literally this same phrase : "*It is from you alone that I expect any consolation.*" Is it not amusing to console for and against, and to be the single agent of two directly contrary interests? Behold me, like the Divinity, receiving the diverse petitions of blind mortals, and altering nothing in my immutable decrees. I have deserted that august part, however, to assume that of the consoling angel; and have been, as the precept bids us, to visit my friends in their affliction.

I began with the mother; I found her wrapped in a sadness which already avenges you in part for the obstacles she has thrown in your way, on the side of your fair prude. Everything has succeeded marvellously, and my only anxiety was lest Madame de Volanges should take advantage of the moment to gain her daughter's confidence: which would have been quite easy, had she employed with her the language of kindness and affection, and given to reasonable counsels the air and tone of indulgent tenderness. Luckily she had armed herself with severity; in short, she had behaved so unwisely that I could only applaud. It is true that she thought of frustrating all our schemes, by the course which she had resolved on of sending her daughter back to the convent: but I warded off this blow, and induced her merely to make a threat of it, in the event of Danceny continuing his pursuit; this in order to compel both to a circumspection which I believe necessary to success.

I next went to the daughter. You would not believe how grief improves her! If she does but take to coquetry, I warrant that she will be often weeping; but this time she wept in all sincerity. . . . Struck by this new charm, which I had not know in her, and which I was very pleased to observe, I gave her at first but clumsy consolations, which rather increased her sorrow than assuaged it; and by this means I brought her well nigh to choking-point. She wept no more, and for a moment I was afraid of convulsions. I advised her to go to bed, to which she agreed; I served her for

waiting-maid: she had made no toilette, and soon her dishevelled hair was falling over her shoulders and bosom, which were entirely bare; I embraced her; she abandoned herself in my arms, and her tears began to flow again without an effort. Lord! how beautiful she was! Ah, if the Magdalen was like that, she must have been far more dangerous in her penitence than when she sinned.

When the disconsolate fair one was in bed, I started to console her in good faith. I first reassured her as to her fear about the convent. I excited a hope in her of seeing Danceny in secret; and sitting upon the bed: "If *he* was here," said I; then, embroidering on this theme, I led her from distraction to distraction, until she had quite forgotten her affliction. We should have separated in a complete satisfaction with one another, if she had not wished to charge me with a letter to Danceny; which I consistently refused. Here are my reasons for this, which you will doubtless approve:

To begin with, it would have been to compromise myself openly with Danceny; and though this was the only reason I could employ with the little one, there are plenty of others which hold between you and me. Would it not have been to risk the fruit of my labours to give our young people so soon a means so easy of lightening their pains? And then, I should not be sorry to compel them to introduce some servants into this adventure; for, if it is to work out well, which is what I hope for, it must become known immediately after the marriage, and there are few surer methods of publishing it. Or if, by a miracle, the servants were not to speak, we would speak ourselves, and it will be more convenient to lay the indiscretion to their account.

You must give this idea, then, to-day to Danceny; and as I am not sure of the waiting-maid of the little Volanges, and she seems to distrust her herself, suggest my own to him, my faithful Victoire. I will take care that the enterprise is successful. This idea pleases me all the more, as the confidence will only be





useful to us and not to them : for I am not at the end of my story.

Whilst I was excusing myself from carrying the child's letter, I was afraid every moment that she would suggest that I should send it by the post, which I could hardly have refused to do. Luckily, either in her confusion or in her ignorance, or again because she was less set on her letter than on a reply to it, which she could not have obtained by this means, she did not speak of it to me; but, to prevent this idea coming to her, or at least her being able to use it, I made up my mind on the spot; and on returning to her mother, persuaded her to send her daughter away for some time, to take her to the country.... And where? Does not your heart beat with joy?.... To your Aunt, to the old Rosemonde. She is to apprise her of it to-day; so, behold you authorized to return to your Puritan, who will no longer be able to reproach you with the scandal of a *tête-à-tête*; and thanks to my pains, Madame de Volanges will herself repair the wrong she had done you.

But listen to me, and do not be so constantly wrapped up in your own affairs as to lose sight of this one; remember that I am interested in it. I want you to become the go-between and counsellor of the two young people. Inform Danceny of this journey and offer him your services. Find no difficulty, except as to getting your letter of credit into the fair one's hands; and demolish this obstacle on the spot by suggesting to him the services of my waiting-maid. There is no doubt but that he will accept; and you will have, as reward for your trouble, the confidence of a young heart, which is always interesting. Poor child, how she will blush when she hands you her first letter! In truth, this *role* of confidant, against which a sort of prejudice has grown up, seems to me a very pretty relaxation, when you are occupied elsewhere; and this is the case in which you will be.

It is upon attention that the *dénouement* of this intrigue will depend. Judge the moment when the actors must be reunited. The country offers a thousand ways; and Danceny cannot fail to

be ready at your first signal, A night, a disguise, a window..... what do I know? But mark me, if the little girl comes back as she went away, I shall quarrel with you. If you consider that she has need of any encouragement from me, send word to me. I think I have given her such a good lesson on the danger of keeping letters, that I may venture to write to her now; and I still cherish the design of making her my pupil.

I believe I forgot to tell you that her suspicious with regard to the surprised correspondence fell at first upon her waiting-maid, but that I turned them towards the confessor. That was a way of killing two birds with one stone,

Adieu, Vicomte, I have been writing to you a long time now, and my dinner is the later for it: but self-love and friendship dictated my letter, and both are garrulous. For the rest, it will be with you by three o'clock, and that is all you need.

Pity me now, if you dare; and go and visit the woods of the Comte de B<sup>...</sup>, if they tempt you. You say that he keeps them for the pleasure of his friends! Is the man a friend of all the world then? But adieu, I am hungry.

Paris, 9th September, 17<sup>th</sup>

## LETTER THE SIXTY-FOURTH

### *The Chevalier Danceny to Madame de Volanges*

(A draft enclosed in letter the sixty-sixth, from the Vicomte  
to the Marquise)

WITHOUT seeking, Madame, to justify my conduct, and without complaining of yours, I cannot but grieve at an event which brings unhappiness to three persons, all three worthier of a happier fate. More sensible to the grief of being the cause of it than even to that of being its victim, I have tried frequently, since yesterday, to have the honour to write to you, without being able to find the strength. I have, however, so many things to say to you that I must make a great effort over myself; and if this letter has little order and sequence, you must be sufficiently sensible of my painful situation to grant me some indulgence.

Permit me, first, to protest against the first sentence of your letter. I venture to say that I have abused neither your confidence nor the innocence of Mademoiselle de Volanges; in my actions I respected both. These alone depended on me; and when you would render me responsible for an involuntary sentiment, I am not afraid to add that that which Mademoiselle your daughter has inspired in me is of a kind which may be displeasing to you but cannot offend

you. Upon this subject, which touches me more than I can say, I wish for no other judge than you, and my letters for my witnesses.

You forbid me to present myself at your house in future, and doubtless I shall submit to everything which it shall please you to order on this subject: but will not this sudden and total absence give as much cause for the remarks which you would avoid as the order which, for that very same reason, you did not wish to leave at your door? I insist all the more on this point, in that it is far more important for Mademoiselle de Volanges than for me. I beg you then to weigh everything attentively, and not to permit your severity to lessen your prudence. Persuaded that the simple interest of Mademoiselle your daughter will dictate your resolves, I shall await fresh orders from you.

Meanwhile, in case you should permit me to pay you my court sometimes, I undertake, Madame (and you can count on my promise), not to abuse the opportunity by attempting to speak privately with Mademoiselle de Volanges, or to send any letter to her. The fear of compromising her reputation decides me to this sacrifice; and the happiness of sometimes seeing her will be my reward.

This paragraph of my letter is also the only reply that I can make to what you tell me as to the fate you reserve for Mademoiselle de Volanges, and which you would make dependent on my conduct. I should deceive you were I to promise you more. A vile seducer can adapt his plans to circumstances, and calculate upon events; but the love which animates me permits me only two sentiments, courage and constancy. What, I! consent to be forgotten by Mademoiselle de Volanges, to forget her myself! No, no, never! I will be faithful to her, she has received my vow, and I renew it this day. Forgive me, Madame, I am losing myself, I must return.

There remains one other matter to discuss with you; that of the letters which you demand from me. I am truly pained to have to add a refusal to the wrongs which you already accuse me of: but I

beg you, listen to my reasons, and deign to remember, in order to appreciate them, that the only consolation of my unhappiness at having lost your friendship is the hope of retaining your esteem.

The letters of Mademoiselle de Volanges, always so precious to me, have become doubly so at present. They are the solitary good thing which remains to me; they alone retrace for me a sentiment which is all the charm of life to me. However, you may believe me, I should not hesitate an instant in making the sacrifice, and my regret at being deprived of them would yield to my desire of proving to you my respectful deference; but considerations more powerful restrain me, and I assure you that you yourself cannot blame me for them.

You have, it is true, the secret of Mademoiselle de Volanges; but permit me to say that I am authorized to believe it is the result of surprise and not of confidence. I do not pretend to blame a proceeding which is, perhaps, authorized by maternal solicitude. I respect your rights, but they do not extend so far as to dispence me from my duties. The most sacred of all is never to betray the confidence which is entrusted to you. It would be to fail in this to expose to the eyes of another the secrets of a heart which did but wish to reveal them to mine. If Mademoiselle your daughter consents to confide them to you, let her speak; her letters are of no use to you. If she wishes, on the contrary, to lock her secret within herself, you doubtless cannot expect me to be the person to instruct you.

As for the mystery in which you desire this incident to be buried, rest assured, Madame, that, in all that concerns Mademoiselle de Volanges, I can rival even a mother's heart. To complete my work of removing all cause for anxiety from you, I have foreseen everything. This precious deposit, which bore hitherto the inscription: *Papers to be burned*, carries now the words: *Papers belonging to Madame de Volanges*. The course which I have taken should prove to you also that my refusal does not refer to

any fear that you might find in these letters one single sentiment with which you could personally find fault.

This, Madame, is indeed a long letter. It will not have been long enough, if it leaves you the least doubt as to the honesty of my sentiments, my very sincere regret at having displeased you, and the profound respect with which I have the honour to be, etc.

Paris, 9th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SIXTY-FIFTH

### *The Chevalier Danceny to Cécile Volanges.*

(Sent open to the Marquise de Merteuil in letter the sixty-sixth  
from the Vicomte)

**(** MY Cécile! what is to become of us? What God will save us from the misfortunes which threaten us? Let love, at least, give us the courage to support them! How can I paint for you my astonishment, my despair, at the sight of my letters, at the reading of Madame de Volanges' missive? Who can have betrayed us? On whom do your suspicions fall? Could you have committed any imprudence? What are you doing now? What have they said to you? I would know everything, and I am ignorant of all. Perhaps, you yourself are no better informed than I.

I send you your Mamma's note and a copy of my reply. I hope that you will approve of what I have said. I need also your approval of all the measures I have taken since this fatal event; they are all with the object of having news of you, of giving you mine; and, who knows? perhaps of seeing you again, and more freely than ever.

Imagine, my Cécile, the pleasure of finding ourselves together again, of being able to seal anew our vows of eternal love, and of

seeing in our eyes, of feeling in our souls, that this vow will not be falsified! What pain will not so sweet a moment make us forget! Ah, well, I have hope of seeing it arrive, and I owe it to these same measures which I beg you to approve. What am I saying? I owe it to the consoling care of the most tender of friends; and my sole request is that you will permit this friend to become also your own.

Perhaps, I ought not to have given your confidence away without your consent; but I had misfortune and necessity for my excuse. It is love which has guided me; it is that which claims your indulgence, which begs you to pardon a confidence that was necessary, and without which we should, perhaps, have been separated for ever. You know the friend of whom I speak: he is the friend of the woman whom you love best. It is the Vicomte de Valmont.

My plan in addressing him was, at first, to beg him to induce Madame de Merteuil to take charge of a letter for you. He did not think this method could succeed, but, in default of the mistress, he answered for the maid, who was under obligations to him. It is she who will give you this letter; and you can give her your reply.

This assistance will hardly be of use to us, if, as M. de Valmont believes, you leave immediately for the country. But then it will be he himself who will serve us. The lady to whom you are going is his kinswoman. He will take advantage of this pretext to repair thither at the same time that you do; and it will be through him that our mutual correspondence will pass. He assures me, even, that if you will let yourself be guided by him, he will procure us the means of meeting, without your running the risk of being in any way compromised.

Now, my Cécile, if you love me, if you pity my misery, if, as I hope, you share my regret, will you refuse your confidence to a man who will become our guardian angel? Without him, I should



be reduced to the despair of being unable even to alleviate the grief I have caused you. It will finish, I hope: but promise me, my tender friend, not to abandon yourself overmuch to it, not to let it break you down. The idea of your grief is insupportable torture to me. I would give my life to make you happy! You know that well. May the certainty that you are adored carry some consolation to your soul! Mine has need of your assurance that you pardon love for the ills it has made you suffer.

Adieu, my Cécile, adieu, my tender love!

Paris, 9th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SIXTY-SIXTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

You will see, my lovely friend, by a persusal of the two enclosed letters, whether I have well fulfilled your project. Although both are dated to-day, they were written yesterday at my house, and beneath my eyes; that to the little girl says all that we wanted. One can but humble one's self before the profundity of your views, when one judges of it by the success of your measures. Danceny is all on fire; and assuredly, at the first opportunity, you will have no more reproaches to make him. If his fair *ingénue* choose to be tractable, all will be finished a short time after her arrival in the country; I have a hundred methods all prepared. Thanks to your care, behold me decidedly *the friend of Danceny*; it only remains for him to become *Prince*.

He is still very young, this Danceny! Would you believe it, I have never been able to prevail on him to promise the mother to renounce his love; as if there were much hindrance in a promise, when one is determined not to keep it! It would be deceit, he kept on repeating to me: is not this scruple edifying, especially in the wouldbe seducer of the daughter? That is so like men! all equally rascally in their designs, the weakness they display in the execution they christen probity.

It is your affair to prevent Madame de Volanges from taking alarm at the little sallies which our young man has permitted himself in his letter; preserve us from the convent; try also to make her abandon her request for the child's letters. To begin with, he will not give them up, and I am of his opinion; here love and reason are in accord. I have read them, these letters; I have assimilated the tedium of them. They may become useful. I will explain.

In spite of the prudence which we shall employ, there may arise a scandal; this would break off the marriage, would it not? and spoil all our Gercourt projects. But, as on my side I have to be revenged on the mother, I reserve for myself in such a case the daughter's dishonour. By selecting carefully from this correspondence, and producing only a part of it, the little Volanges would appear to have made all the first overtures, and to have absolutely thrown herself at his head. Some of the letters would even compromise the mother, and would, at any rate, convict her of unpardonable negligence. I am quite aware that the scrupulous Danceny would revolt against this at first; but, as he would be personally attacked, I think he would be open to reason. It is a thousand chances to one that things will not turn out so; but one must foresee everything.

Adieu, my lovely friend: it would be very amiable of you to come and sup to-morrow at the Maréchale de \*\*\*'s, I could not refuse.

I presume I have no need to recommend your secrecy, as regards Madame de Volanges, upon my country project. She would at once decide to stay in Town: whereas, once arrived there, she will not start off again the next day; and, if she only gives us a week, I answer for everything.

Paris, 9th September, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE SIXTY-SEVENTH

*The Présidente de Tourvel to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

I did not mean to answer you again, Monsieur, and, perhaps, the embarrassment I feel at the present moment is itself an effectual proof that I ought not. However, I would not leave you any cause of complaint against me; I wish to convince you that I have done for you everything I could.

I permitted you to write to me, you say? I agree; but when you remind me of that permission, do you think I forget on what conditions it was given? If I had been as faithful as you have proved the reverse, would you have received a single reply from me? This is, however, the third; and when you do all that in you lies to compel me to break off this correspondence, it is I who am busy with the means of continuing it. There is one, but only one; and if you refuse to take it, it will prove to me, whatever you may say, how little value you set upon it.

Forsake, then, a language to which I may not and will not listen; renounce a sentiment which offends and alarms me, and to which you would perhaps be less attached, if you reflected that it is the obstacle which separates us. Is this sentiment the only one, then, that you can understand? And must love have this one fault

the more in my eyes, that it excludes friendship? Would you yourself be so wrong as not to wish for your friend her in whom you have desired more tender sentiments? I would not believe it: that humiliating idea would revolt me, would divide me from you without hope of return.

In offering you my friendship, Monsieur, I give you all that is mine to give, all of which I can dispose. What can you desire more? To give way to this sentiment, so gentle, so suited to my heart, I only await your assent and the word which I ask of you, that this friendship will suffice for your happiness. I will forget all that I may have been told; I will trust in you to be at the pains of justifying my choice.

You see my frankness; it should prove to you my confidence; it will rest with you only, if it is to be further augmented: but I warn you that the first word of love destroys it for ever, and restores to me all my fears; above all, that it will become the signal for my eternal silence with regard to you.

If, as you say, you have turned away from your errors, will you not rather be the object of a virtuous woman's friendship than of a guilty woman's remorse? Adieu, Monsieur; you understand that after having spoken thus I can say nothing more until you have replied to me.

At the Château de . . . , 9th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SIXTY-EIGHTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel*

**H**ow, Madame, am I to answer your last letter? How dare be true, when my sincerity may ruin my cause with you? No matter, I must; I will have the courage. I tell myself, I repeat to myself, that it is better to deserve you than to obtain you: and, must you deny me for ever a happiness that I shall never cease to desire, I must at least prove to you that my heart is worthy of it.

What a pity, that, as you say, I have *turned away from my errors!* With what transports of joy I should have read that same letter, to which I tremble to-day to reply. You speak to me therein with *frankness*, you display me *confidence*, and you offer me your *friendship*: what good things, Madame, and how I regret that I can not profit by them! Why am I no longer what I was?

If I were, indeed, if I felt for you only an ordinary fancy, that light fancy which is the child of seduction and pleasure, which to-day, however, is christened love, I should hasten to extract advantage from all that I could obtain. With scant delicacy as to means, provided that they procured me success, I should encourage your frankness from my need of finding you out; I should desire your confidence with the design of betraying it; I should accept

your friendship with the hope of beguiling it.... What, Madame! does this picture alarm you?... Ah, well, it would be a true picture of me, were I to tell you that I consented to be no more than your friend.

What, I! I consent to share with anyone a sentiment which has emanated from your soul! If I ever tell you so, do not believe me. From that moment I should seek to deceive you; I might desire you still, but I should assuredly love you no longer.

It is not that amiable frankness, sweet confidence, sensible friendship are without value in my eyes.... But love! True love, and such as you inspire, by uniting all these sentiments, by giving them more energy, would not know how to lend itself, like them, to that tranquillity, to that coldness of soul, which permits comparisons, which even suffers preferences. No, Madame, I will not be your friend; I will love you with the most tender, even the most ardent love, although the most respectful. You can drive it to despair, but you cannot annihilate it.

By what right do you pretend to dispose of a heart whose homage you refuse? By what refinement of cruelty do you rob me of even the happiness of loving you? That happiness is mine; it is independent of you; I shall know how to defend it. If it is the source of my ills, it is also their remedy.

No, once more, no. Persist in your cruel refusals, but leave me my love. You take pleasure in making me unhappy! ah, well! be it so, endeavour to wear out my courage. I shall know how to force you at least to decide my fate; and perhaps some day you will render me more justice. It is not that I hope ever to make you susceptible: but, without being persuaded, you will be convinced; you will say to yourself: I judged him ill.

To put it rightly, it is to yourself that you are unjust. To know you without loving you, to love you without being constant, are two things which are equally impossible; and, in spite of the modesty which adorns you, it must be easier for you to feel pity than surprise

at the sentiments which you arouse. For me, whose only merit is that I have known how to appreciate you, I will not lose that; and far from accepting your insidious offers, I renew at your feet my vow to love you always.

Paris, 10th September, 1791.



## LETTER THE SIXTY-NINTH

*Céciles Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny.*

(A note written in pencil, and copied out by Danceny)

**Y**ou ask me what I am doing; I love you and I weep. My mother no longer speaks to me; she has taken pens, ink, and paper away from me; I am making use of a pencil which has happily been left to me, and I am writing on a fragment of your letter. I needs must approve all you have done; I love you too well not to take every means of having news of you and of giving you my own. I did not like M. de Valmont, and I did not know he was so great a friend of yours; I will try to get used to him, and I will love him for your sake. I do not know who it is that has betrayed us; it can only be my waiting-maid or my confessor. I am very miserable: we are going to the country to-morrow; I do not know for how long. My God! to see you no more! I have no more room: adieu, try to read this. These words traced in pencil will perhaps be effaced, but never the sentiments engraved on my heart.

Paris, 10th September, 17<sup>th</sup>

## LETTER THE SEVENTIETH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

I HAVE an important warning to give you, my dear friend. As you know, I supped yesterday with the Maréchale de \*\*\*: you were spoken of, and I said, not all the good which I think, but all that which I do not think. Everyone appeared to be of my opinion, and the conversation languished, as ever happens when one says only good of one's neighbour, when a voice was raised in contradiction: it was Prévau's.

"Heaven forbid," he said, rising, "that I should doubt the virtue of Madame de Merteuil! But I would dare believe that she owes it more to her lightness of character than to her principles. It is perhaps more difficult to follow her than to please her; and, as one rarely fails, when one runs after a woman, to meet others on the way; as, after all, these others may be as good as she is, or better; some are distracted by a fresh fancy, others stop short from lassitude; and she is, perhaps, the woman in all Paris who has had least cause to defend herself. As for me," he added, encouraged by the smile of some of the women, "I shall not believe in Madame de Merteuil's virtue, until I have killed six horses in paying my court to her."

This ill-natured joke succeeded, as do all those which savour of scandal: and, during the laugh which it excited, Prévau resumed his place, and the general conversation changed. But the two, Comtesse de B\*\*\*, by the side of whom our sceptic sat, had a private conversation with him, which luckily I was in a position to over-hear.

The challenge to render you susceptible was accepted; word was pledged that everything was to be told: and of all the pledges that might be given in this adventure, this one should assuredly be the most religiously kept. But there you are, forewarned, and you know the proverb.

It remains for me to tell you that this Prévau, whom you do not know, is infinitely amiable, and even more adroit. If you have sometimes heard me declare the contrary, it is only that I do not like him, that it is my pleasure to thwart his success, and that I am not ignorant of the weight of my suffrage with thirty or so of our most fashionable women. In fact, I prevented him for long, by this means, from appearing on what we call the great scene; and he did prodigies, without for that winning any more reputation. But the fame of his triple adventure, by turning people's eyes on him, gave him that confidence which hitherto he had lacked, and which has rendered him really formidable. He is, in short, to-day perhaps the only man whom I should fear to meet in my path; and, apart from your own interest, you will be rendering me a real service by making him appear ridiculous by the way. I leave him in good hands, and I cherish the hope that, on my return, he will be a ruined man.

I promise, in revenge, to carry through the adventure of your pupil, and to concern myself as much with her as with my fair prude.

The latter has just sent me a letter of capitulation. The whole letter announces her desire to be deceived. It is impossible to suggest a method more time-worn or more easy. She wishes me to

become *her friend*. But I, who love new and difficult methods, do not mean to cry quits with her so cheaply; and I most certainly should not have been at such pains with her, to conclude with an ordinary seduction.

What I propose, on the contrary, is that she should feel, and feel thoroughly, the value of each one of the sacrifices she shall make me; not to lead her too swiftly for remorse to follow her; to let her virtue expire in a slow agony; to concentrate her, unceasingly, upon the heart-breaking spectacle; and only to grant her the happiness of having me in her arms, after compelling her no longer to dissimulate her desire. In truth, I am of little worth indeed, if I am not worth the trouble of asking for. And can I take a less revenge for the haughtiness of a woman who seems to blush to confess that she adores?

I have, therefore, refused the precious friendship, and have held to my title of lover. As I do not deny that this title, which seems at first no more than a verbal quibble, is, however, of real importance to obtain, I have taken a great deal of pains with my letter, and endeavoured to be lavish of that disorder which alone can depict sentiment. I have, in short, been as irrational as it was possible for me to be: for, without one be irrational, there is no tenderness; and it is for this reason, I believe, that women are so much our superiors in love-letters.

I concluded mine with a piece of cajolery; and that is another result of my profound observation. After a woman's heart has been for some time exercised, it has need of repose; and I have remarked that cajolery was, to all, the softest pillow that could be offered.

Adieu, my lovely friend; I leave to-morrow. If you have any commands to give me for the Comtesse de \*\*, I will halt at her house, at any rate for dinner. I am veyed to leave without seeing you. Send me your sublime instructions and aid me with your wise counsels, in this critical moment.

Above all, defend yourself against Prévau ; and grant that I may make amends to you one day for the sacrifice ! Adieu.

Paris, 11th September, 1777.

## LETTER THE SEVENTY-FIRST

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

MY idiot of a *chasseur* has left my desk in Paris ! My [fair one's] letters, those of Danceny to the little Volanges : all have remained behind, and I have need of all. He is going off to repair his stupidity ; and whilst he is saddling his horse, I will tell you my night's story : for I beg you to believe I do not waste my time.

The adventure in itself is but a small thing ; a *réchauffé* with the Vicomtesse de M<sup>me</sup>. But it interested me in its details. I am delighted, moreover, to let you see that, if I have a talent for ruining women, I have none the less, when I wish it, that of saving them. The most difficult course or the merriest is the one I choose ; and I never reproach myself for a good action, provided that it has kept me in practice or amused me.

I found the Vicomtesse here, and as she joined her entreaties to the persecutions with which they tried to persuade me to pass the night at the *château* : "Well, I consent," I said to her, "on condition that I pass it with you." "That is impossible," she answered : "Vressac is here." So far, I had but meant to say the polite thing to her ; but the word impossible revolted me as usual. I felt humiliated at being sacrificed to Vressac, and I resolved not to suffer it ; I insisted therefore.

Circumstances were not favourable to me. This Vressac had been awkward enough to give offence to the Vicomte; so much so that the Vicomtesse can no longer receive him at home, and this visit to the good Comtesse had been arranged between them, in order to try and snatch a few nights. The Vicomte had at first even shown signs of ill-humour at meeting Vressac there; but, as his love of sport is even stronger than his jealousy, he stayed none the less: and the Comtesse, always the same as you have known her, after lodging the wife in the great corridor, put the husband on one side of her and the lover on the other, and left them to arrange things amongst themselves. The evil destiny of both willed that I should be housed opposite them.

That very day, that is to say, yesterday, Vressac, who, as you will well believe, cajoles the Vicomte, went out shooting with him in spite of his distaste for sport, and quite counted on consoling himself at night in the wife's arms for the *ennui* which the husband caused him all day: but I judged that he would have needs of repose, and busied myself with the means of persuading his mistress to give him the time to take it.

I succeeded, and persuaded her to pick a quarrel with him, concerning that very same shooting party to which, very obviously, he had only consented for her sake. She could not have chosen a more sorry pretext; but no woman is better endowed than the Vicomtesse with that talent, common to all women, of putting ill-humour in the place of reason, and of being never so difficult to appease as when she is in the wrong. Neither was the moment convenient for explanations; and, as I only wished her for one night, I consented to their reconciliation on the morrow.

Vressac was greeted sullenly on his return. He sought to demand the cause; he was abused. He tried to justify himself; the husband, who was present, served for a pretext to break off the conversation; finally, he attempted to take advantage of a moment when the husband was absent, to ask that she would be kind enough

to listen to him that night: it was then that the Vicomtesse became sublime. She declaimed against the audacity of men who, because they have experienced a woman's favours, suppose that they have the right to abuse her, even when she has cause of complaint against him; and, having thus skilfully changed the issue, she talked sentiment and delicacy so well that Vressac grew dumb and confused, and I myself was tempted to believe that she was right: for you must know that, as a friend of both of them, I made a third at this conversation.

In the end, she declared positively that she would not add the fatigues of love to those of the chase, and that she would reproach herself were she to disturb such sweet pleasures. The husband returned. The disconsolate Vressac, who was no longer at liberty to reply, addressed himself to me; and, having, at great length, expounded his reasons, which I knew as well as he, he begged me to speak to the Vicomtesse, and I promised him to do so. I spoke to her, in effect; but it was in order to thank her, and to arrange the hour and manner of our *rendez-vous*.

She told me that, situated as she was between her husband and her lover, she had thought it more prudent to go to Vressac than to receive him in her apartment; and that, since I was placed opposite her, she thought it was safer also to come to me; that she would repair to my room as soon as her waiting-maid had left her alone; that I had only to leave my door ajar and await her.

Everything was carried out as we had arranged; and she came to my room about one o'clock in the morning.

*“ Dans le simple appareil*

*D'une beauté qu'on vient d'arracher au sommeil.”*

As I am quite without vanity, I will not go into the details of the night; but you know me, and I was satisfied with myself.

At day-break, we had to separate. It is here that the interest begins. The imprudent woman had thought to have left her door ajar; we found it shut, and the key was left inside. You have no



idea of the expression of despair, with which the Vicomtesse said to me at once: "Ah, I am lost!" You must admit it would have been amusing to have left her in this situation: but could I suffer a woman to be ruined for me who had not been ruined by me? And should I, like the commonalty of men, let myself be overcome by circumstances? A method had to be found therefore. What would you have done, my fair friend? Hear what was my conduct; it was successful.

I soon realized that the door in question could be burst in, on condition that one made a mighty amount of noise. I persuaded the Vicomtesse, therefore, not without difficulty, to utter some piercing cries of terror, such as *thieves, murder, etc., etc.* And we arranged that, at the first cry, I should break in the door, and she should rush to her bed. You would not believe how much time it needed to decide her, even after she had consented. However, it had to be done that way, and at my first kick the door yielded. The Vicomtesse did well not to lose time; for, at the same instant, the Vicomte and Vressac were in the corridor, and the waiting-maid had also run up to her mistress's chamber. I alone kept my coolness, and I profited by it to go and extinguish a night-light which still burned, for you can imagine how ridiculous it would have been to feign this panic terror with a light in one's room. I then took husband and lover to task for their sluggish sleep, assuring them that the cries, at which I had run up, and my efforts to burst open the door, had lasted at least five minutes.

The Vicomtesse, who had regained her courage in bed, seconded me well enough, and swore by all her gods that there had been a thief in her chamber; she protested with all the more sincerity in that she had never had such a fright in her life. We searched everywhere and found nothing, when I pointed to the overturned night-light, and concluded that, without a doubt, a rat had caused the damage and the alarm; my opinion was accepted unanimously; and, after some well-worn pleasantries on the subject of rats, the

Vicomte was the first to regain his chamber and his bed, praying his wife for the future to keep her rats quieter.

Vressac, who was left alone with us, approached the Vicomtesse to tell her tenderly that it was a vengeance of Love; to which she answered, glancing at me, "He was indeed angry then, for he has taken ample vengeance; but," she added, "I am exhausted with fatigue and I want to sleep."

I was good-humoured for the moment; consequently, before we separated, I pleaded Vressac's cause and effected a reconciliation. The two lovers embraced, and I, in my turn, was embraced by both. I had no more relish for the kisses of the Vicomtesse; but I confess that Vressac's pleased me. We went out together; and after I had accepted his lengthy thanks, we both betook ourselves to bed.

If you find this history amusing, I do not ask you to keep it secret. Now that I have had my amusement out of it, it is but just that the public should have its turn. For the moment, I am only speaking of the story; perhaps, we shall soon say as much of the heroine.

Adieu! My *chasseur* has been waiting for an hour; I take only the time to embrace you, and to recommend you, above all, to beware of Prévan.

At the Château de . . . , 15th September, 17".

## LETTER THE SEVENTY-SECOND

### *The Chevalier Danceny to Cécile Volanges*

(Not delivered until the 14th)

**O** my Cécile! how I envy Valmont's lot! To-morrow he will see you: it is he who will give you this letter, and I, languishing afar from you, must drag on my painful existence betwixt unhappiness and regret. My friend, my tender friend, pity my misfortunes; above all, pity me for your own; it is in the face of them that my courage deserts me.

How terrible it is to me that I should have caused your misfortune! But for me, you would be happy and tranquil. Can you forgive me? Ah, say, say that you forgive me; tell me also that you love me, that you will always love me. I need that you repeat it to me. It is not that I doubt it: but it seems to me that, the more sure I am of it, the sweeter it is to hear it said. You love me, do you-not? Yes, you love me with all your soul. I do not forget that it is the last word I heard you utter. How I have treasured it in my heart! How deeply it is graven there! And with what transports has not mine replied to it!

Alas, in that moment of happiness, I was far from foreseeing the awful fate which awaited us! Let us occupy ourselves, my Cécile, with the means of alleviating it. If I am to believe my

friend, it will suffice, to attain this, that you should treat him with the confidence which he deserves.

I was grieved, I confess, at the unfavourable opinion you appear to have had of him. I recognized there the prejudices of your Mamma; it was to submit to them that, for some time past, I had neglected that truly amiable man, who to-day does everything for me; who, in short, labours to reunite us, whom your Mamma has separated. I implore you, my dear friend, look upon him with a more favourable eye. Reflect that he is my friend, that he wishes to be yours, that he can afford me the happiness of seeing you. If these reasons do not convince you, my Cécile, you do not love me as well as I love you, you do not love me as much as you used to love me. Ah, if ever you were to come to love me less! But no, the heart of my Cécile is mine, it is mine for life; and if I have to dread the pain of a love which is unfortunate, her constancy will save me at least from the torments of a love betrayed.

Adieu, my charming friend; do not forget how I suffer, and that it only rests with you to make me happy, completely happy. Hear my heart's vow, and receive the most tender kisses of love.

Paris, 11th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SEVENTY-THIRD

*The Vicomte de Valmont to Cécile Volanges.*

(Delivered with the preceding)

THE friend who serves you knows' that you have no writing materials, and he has already provided for this want. You will find in the ante-room of the apartment you occupy, beneath the great press, on the left-hand side, a supply of pens and ink which he will renew when you require it, and which, so it seems to him, you can leave in the same place, if you do not find a surer one.

He asks you not to be offended with him, if he seems to pay no attention to you in public, and only to regard you as a child. This behaviour seems to him necessary, in order to inspire the sense of security of which he has need, and to enable him to work more effectively for his friend's happiness and your own. He will try to find occasions for speaking with you, when he has anything to tell you or give to you; and he hopes to succeed, if you show any zeal to second him.

He also advises you to return to him, successively, the letters which you may have received, in order that there may be less risk of your compromising yourself.

He concludes by assuring you that, if you will give him your confidence, he will take every care to alleviate the persecution that

a too harsh mother is using against two persons of whom one is already his best friend, whilst the other seems to him worthy of the most tender interest.

At the Château de . . . , 5th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SEVENTY-FOURTH

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**A**n, since when, my friend, do you take alarm so easily? Is this Prévan so very formidable then? But see how simple and modest am I! I have often met him, this haughty conqueror; I hardly looked at him! It required nothing less than your letter to excite that amount of attention from me. I repaired my injustice yesterday. He was at the Opera, almost exactly opposite me, and I took stock of him. He is handsome at any rate, yes, very handsome with fine and delicate features! He must gain by being seen close at hand. And you tell me he wants to have me! Assuredly it will be my honour and pleasure. Seriously, I have a fancy for it, and I now confide to you that I have taken the first steps. I do not know if they will succeed. Thus the matter stands.

He was not two paces off from me, as we came out from the Opera, and I, very loudly, made an appointment with the Marquise de \*\*\* to sup on Friday with the Maréchale. It is, I think, the only house where I can meet him. I have no doubt that he heard me.... If the ungrateful fellow were not to come! But tell me, do you think he will come? Do you know that, if he were not to come, I should be in a bad humour all the evening? You see that he will

not find so much difficulty in *following me*; what will more astonish you is that he will have still less in *pleasing me*. He would, he said, kill six horses in paying his court to me! Oh, I will save those horses' lives! I shall never have the patience to wait so long a time. You know it is not one of my principles to leave people languishing, when once I am decided; and I am for him.

Please now confess that there is some pleasure in talking reason to me! Has not your *important warning* been a great success? But what would you have? I have been vegetating for so long! It is more than six weeks since I permitted myself a diversion. This one presents itself; can I refuse myself it? Is not the object worth the trouble? Is there any more agreeable, in whatever sense you take the word?

You yourself are forced to do him justice; you do more than praise him, you are jealous of him. Ah, well! I will not set up as judge between the two of you; but, to begin with, one should investigate, and that is what I want to do. I shall be an impartial judge, and you shall both be weighed in the same balance. As for you, I already have your papers, and your affair is thoroughly enquired into. Is it not only just that I should now occupy myself with your adversary? Come now, yield with a good grace; and as a commencement, let me hear, I beg you, what is this triple adventure of which he is the hero. You speak of it to me as though I knew of nothing else, and I do not know the first word of it. Apparently, it must have occurred during my expedition to Geneva, and your jealousy prevented you from writing to me about it. Repair this fault at the earliest possible; remember that *nothing which interests him is alien to me*, I certainly think that they were still talking of it when I returned; but I was otherwise occupied, and I rarely listen to anything of that sort which is not the affair of to-day or of yesterday.

Even if what I ask of you should go somewhat against the grain, is it not the least price you can pay for the pains I have taken for



you? Have these not sent you back to your Présidente, when your plunders had separated you from her? Was it not I, again, who put into your hands the wherewithal to revenge yourself for the bitter zeal of Madame de Volanges? You have complained so often of the time you waste in searching after your adventures! Now, you have them under your thumb. Betwixt love and hate, you have but to choose; they both lie under the same roof; and you can double your existence, caress with one hand and strike with the other. It is even to me, again, that you owe the adventure of the Vicomtesse. I am quite satisfied with it; but, as you say, it must be talked about; for if the situation could induce you, as I conceive, to prefer for a moment mystery to *éclat*, it must be admitted, none the less, that the woman did not merit so honourable a procedure.

I have besides, cause of complaint against her. The Chevalier de Belleroche finds her prettier than is to my liking; and, for many reasons, I shall be glad to have a pretext for breaking with her: now none is more convenient than to be obliged to say: One cannot possibly know that women any longer.

Adieu, Vicomte; remember that, situated as you are, time is precious; I shall employ mine by occupying myself with Prévau's happiness.

Paris, 15th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SEVENTY-FIFTH

*Cécile Volanges to Sophie Carnay.*

*(N.B. In this letter, Cécile Volanges relates with the utmost detail all that concerns her in the events which the Reader already knows from the conclusion of the fifty-ninth and following letters. It seemed as well to suppress this repetition. She finally speaks of the Vicomte de Valmont, and expresses herself thus : )*

... I ASSURE you that he is a most remarkable man. Mamma speaks very ill of him, but the Chevalier Danceny says much in his favour, and I think that he is right. I have never seen a man so clever. When he gave me Danceny's letter, it was in the midst of all the company, and nobody saw anything of it: it is true I was terribly frightened, because I had not expected anything; but now I shall be prepared. I have already quite understood what he wants me to do when I give him my answer. It is very easy to understand him, because he has a look which says anything he wants. I don't know how he does it: he told me in his note that he would appear not to take any notice of me before Mamma; indeed, one would say, all the time, that he never thinks of me, and yet, every time I seek his eyes, I am sure to meet them at once.

There is a great friend of Mamma's here, whom I did not know, who also has the air of not loving M. de Valmont too well, although he is full of attentions for her. I am afraid that he will bore himself soon with the life one leads here, and go back to Paris; that would be very vexing. He must indeed have a good heart to have come on purpose to do a service to his friend and me. I should much like to show my gratitude to him, but I do not know how to get speech with him; and when I find the occasion, I should be so ashamed that, perhaps, I should not know what to say to him.

It is only to Madame de Merteuil that I talk freely, when I speak of my love. Perhaps, even with you, to whom I tell everything, I should feel embarrassed if we were talking. With Danceny himself, I have often felt, as though in spite of myself, a certain alarm which prevented me from telling him all that I thought. I reproach myself greatly for this now, and I would give everything in the world to find a moment to tell him once, only once, how much I love him. M. de Valmont promised him that, if I would be guided by him, he would contrive an opportunity for us to see one another again. I will certainly do everything he wants; but I cannot conceive how it is possible. Adieu, my dear friend; I have no more room left.

At the Château de . . . , 14th September, 17<sup>e</sup>.

## LETTER THE SEVENTY-SIXTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

**E**ITHER your letter is a piece of banter which I have not understood, or you were in a dangerous delirium when you wrote it. If I knew you less well, my lovely friend, I should truly be most alarmed ; and, whatever you may say, I do not take alarm too easily.

It is in vain that I read and re-read your letter, I am none the more advanced ; for to take it in the natural sense which it presents is out of the question. What was it then you wished to say ? Is it merely that it was useless to take so much trouble with an enemy who is so little to be feared ? In that case, you might be wrong. Prévan is really attractive ; he is more so than you believe ; he has above all, the most useful talent of interesting people greatly in his love, by the skill with which he will bring it up in society, and before the company, by making use of the first conversation that occurs. There are few women who do not fall into the trap and reply to him, because, all having pretensions to subtlety, none wishes to lose an opportunity of displaying it. Now you are well aware that the woman who consents to talk of love soon finishes by feeling it, or at least by behaving as if she did. He gains again at this method,

which he has really brought to perfection, in that he can often call the women themselves in testimony of their defeat; and this I tell you, as one who has seen it.

I was never in the secret except at second-hand; for I have never been intimate with Prévau: but, in a word, there were six of us: and the Comtesse de P<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, thinking herself very artful all the time, and having the air indeed, to any one who was not initiated, of conversing in the abstract, told us, with the utmost detail, both how she had succumbed to Prévau, and all that had passed between them. She told this narrative with such a sense of security that she was not even disturbed by a smile which came over all our six faces at the same time; and I shall always remember that one of us, having sought, by way of excuse, to feign a doubt as to what she said, or rather of what she had the air of saying, she answered gravely that we were certainly, none of us, so well informed as she was; and she was not afraid even to address herself to Prévau, and ask him if she had said a word which was not true.

I was right then in believing this man dangerous to everybody: but for you, Marquise, was it not enough that he was *handsome*, *very handsome*, as you tell me yourself? Or that he should make *one of those attacks on you which you sometimes amuse yourself by rewarding, for no other reason than that you find them well contrived*? Or that you should have found it amusing to succumb for any reason whatever? Or—what do I know? Can I divine the thousand and one caprices which govern a woman's head, and in which alone you continue to take after your sex? Now that you are forewarned of the danger, I have no doubt that you will easily avoid it: but it was none the less necessary to forewarn you. I return to my text therefore: what did you mean to say?

If it is only a piece of banter against Prévau, apart from its being very long, it was of no use, addressed to me; it is in society that he must suffer some excellent piece of ridicule, and I renew my prayer to you on this subject.

Ah! I think I hold the key to the enigma! Your letter is a prophecy, not of what you will do, but of what he will think you ready to do, at the moment of the fall which you have prepared for him. I quite approve of this plan: it requires, however, great precautions. You know as well as I do that, as far as the public is concerned, to have a man or to receive his attentions is absolutely the same thing, unless the man be a fool, which Prévau is very far from being. If he can gain the appearances, he will boast, and all will have been said. Fools will believe him, the malicious will have the air of believing; where will your resources be? Remember, I am afraid. It is not that I doubt your skill: but it is the good swimmers who get drowned.

I hold myself to be no duller than another: as for means of dishonouring a woman, I have found a hundred, I have found a thousand; but when I have busied myself to seek how the woman could escape, I have never seen the possibility. You yourself, my fair friend, whose conduct is a masterpiece, I have a hundred times found you to have had more good-luck than you have shown skill.

But, after all, I am, perhaps, seeking for a reason where none exists. I am amazed, however, to think that, for the last hour, I should have been treating seriously what is surely a mere jest on your part. You intend to make fun of me! Ah well! so be it; but make haste, and let us speak of something else. Something else! I am mistaken, it is always the same; women to have or to ruin, and often both.

I have here, as you remark, the wherewithal to exercise myself in both kinds, but not with equal ease. I foresee that vengeance will go quicker than love. The little Volanges has succumbed, I answer for that; she only awaits an opportunity, and I undertake to bring it about. But it is not the same with Madame de Tourvel: this woman is disheartening. I did not conceive it of her; I have a hundred proofs of her love, but I have a thousand of her resistance; and, in truth, I am afraid lest she escape me.

The first effect which my return produced gave me more hope. You will guess that I wished to judge for myself; and, to make sure of seeing the first emotions, I sent no one ahead to announce me, and I calculated my stages so as to arrive when they should be at table. In fact, I dropped from the clouds, like a divinity at the opera, who comes to effect a *dénouement*.

Having made enough noise at my entry to attract all eyes to me, I could see, in one glance, the joy of my old aunt, the annoyance of Madame de Volanges and the confused pleasure of her daughter. My fair one, owing to the seat she occupied, had her back turned to the door. Busy at the moment in carving something, she did not even turn her head; but I said a word to Madame de Rosemonde; and at the first sound, the sensitive Puritan, recognizing my voice, uttered a cry in which I thought I distinguished more love than terror or surprise. I was then in a position to see her face; the tumult of her soul, the struggle between her ideas and sentiments, were depicted on it in a score of different fashions. I sat down to table by her side; she did not know precisely anything of what she did or said. She endeavoured to go on eating; it was out of the question: finally, not a quarter of an hour later, her pleasure and confusion becoming too strong for her, she could devise nothing better than to ask permission to leave the table, and she escaped into the park, on the pretext that she needed to take the air. Madame de Volanges wanted to accompany her; the tender prude would not permit it, too happy, no doubt, to have a pretext for being alone, and to give way without constraint to the soft emotion of her heart!

I made the dinner as short as it was possible to do. Dessert was hardly served, when the infernal Volanges woman, pressed apparently by her need to injure me, rose from her seat to go and find the charming invalid: but I had foreseen this project and I thwarted it. I feigned therefore to take this particular movement for the general signal; and, having risen at the time, the little

Volanges and the *curé* of the place followed the double example ; so that Madame de Rosemonde was left alone at the table with the old Commandant de T<sup>---</sup> ; and they also both decided to leave. We all went then to rejoin my fair one, whom we found in the grove near the *château* : as it was solitude she wanted and not a walk, she was just as pleased to return with us as to make us stay with her.

As soon as I was certain that Madame de Volanges would have no opportunity to speak apart with her, I thought of fulfilling your orders, and busied myself about the interests of your pupil. Immediately after coffee, I went up to my room, and went into the others also, to explore the territory ; I took measures to ensure the little girl's correspondence ; after this first piece of benevolence, I wrote a word of instruction to her and to beg for her confidence ; and I added my note to the letter from Danceny. I returned to the *salon*. I found my beauty reclining on a long chair, in an attitude of delicious unconstraint.

This spectacle, whilst exciting my desires, illumined my gaze ; I felt that this must be tender and beseeching, and I placed myself in such a position that I could bring it into play. Its first effect was to cause the big, modest eyes of the heavenly prude to be cast down. For some time I considered that angelic face ; then, glancing over all her person, I amused myself by divining forms and contours through the light clothing, which I could have wished away. After having descended from head to feet, I returned from feet to head... My fair friend, her soft gaze was fixed upon me ; it was immediately lowered ; but wishing to promote its return, I averted my eyes. Then was established between us that tacit convention, a first treaty of bashful love, which, in order to satisfy the reciprocal need of seeing, allows the looks to succeed one another, until the moment come when they are mingled.

Convinced that this new pleasure occupied my fair one completely, I charged myself with the task of watching over our common



safety; but, having assured myself that conversation was brisk enough to save us from the notice of the company, I sought to obtain from her eyes that they should frankly speak their language. For this I began by surprising certain glances, but with so much reserve that modesty could not take alarm; and to put the bashful creature more at her ease, I appeared to be as embarrassed as herself.

Little by little our eyes, grown accustomed to encounter, were fixed for a longer interval; until at last they quitted each other no more, and I saw in hers that sweet languor which is the happy signal of love and desire: but it was only for a moment; soon recovering herself, she changed, not without a certain shame, her attitude and her look.

Being unwilling that she should suspect I had observed her different movements, I rose with vivacity, asking her, with an air of alarm, if she were unwell. At once, everybody rushed round her. I let them all pass in front of me; and as the little Volanges, who was working at her tapestry near a window, needed some time before she could leave her task, I seized the moment to deliver Danceny's letter.

I was at a little distance from her; I threw the letter into her lap. In truth she did not know what to do. You would have laughed overmuch at her air of surprise and embarrassment, however, I did not laugh, for I feared lest so much clumsiness might betray us. But a quick glance and gesture, strongly accentuated, gave her to understand at last that she was to put the packet in her pocket.

The rest of the day contained nothing of interest. What has passed since will, perhaps, bring about events with which you will be pleased, at any rate in so far as your pupil is concerned: but it is better to employ one's time in carrying out one's projects than in describing them. This is, moreover, the eighth sheet I have written, and I am wearied; and so, adieu.

You will rightly suppose, without my telling it to you, that the

child has replied to Danceny. I have also had a reply from my fair, to whom I wrote on the morrow of my arrival. I send you the two letters. You will or you will not read them: for this incessant, tedious repetition, which already is none too amusing to me, must be insipid indeed to any person not concerned.

Once more, adieu. I am ever mightily fond of you; but I beg you, if you write to me of Prévan, do so 'in such a manner that I may understand you.

At the Château de . . ., 15th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SEVENTY-SEVENTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel.*

**W**HENCE, Madame, can arise the cruel pains which you are at to shun me? How can it be that the most tender zeal on my part meets on yours only with the treatment which one would barely permit one's self with the man against whom one had the greatest cause to complain? What! Love calls me back to your feet; and when a happy chance places me at your side, you prefer to feign indisposition, to alarm your friends, rather than consent to remain near me! How many times, yesterday, did you not turn away your eyes to deprive me of the favour of a glance! And if for one single moment I was able to see less severity there, that moment was so short that it seemed as though you wished less to have me enjoy it than to make me feel what I should lose by being deprived of it.

That is not, I venture to say, either the treatment which love deserves, or that which friendship may be allowed; and yet, of these two sentiments, you know whether the one does not animate me; and the other I was, it seems to me, authorized to believe that you did not withhold. This precious friendship, of which you doubtless thought me worthy, since you were kind enough to offer

it to me—what have I done that I should lose it since? Could I have damaged myself by my confidence, and will you punish me for my frankness? At least, have you no fear lest you abuse the one and the other? In effect, was it not to the bosom of my friend that I entrusted the secret of my heart? Was it not face to face with her alone that I thought myself obliged to refuse conditions which I had only to accept in order to obtain the facility for leaving them unfulfilled, and perhaps of abusing them to my advantage? Would you, in short, by a rigour so undeserved, force me to believe that I had needed but to deceive you in order to obtain greater indulgence?

I do not repent of a conduct which I owed you, as I owed it to myself; but by what fatality does each praiseworthy action of mine become the signal for a fresh misfortune?

It was after giving occasion for the only praise you have ever yet deigned to accord my conduct that I had to groan, for the first time, over the misfortune of having displeased you. It was after proving my perfect submission by depriving myself of the happiness of seeing you, simply to reassure your delicacy, that you wished to break off all correspondence with me, to rob me of that feeble compensation for a sacrifice which you had required, and to take from me even the very love which alone had given you the right to ask it. It is, in short, after having spoken to you with a sincerity which even the interest of that love could not abate that you shun me to-day, like some dangerous seducer whose perfidy you have found out.

Will you, then, never grow weary of being unjust? At least, tell me what new wrongs can have urged you to such severity, and do not refuse to dictate to me the orders which you wish me to obey; when I pledge myself to fulfill them, is it too great a pretension to ask that I may know them?

At the Château de... , 15th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE SEVENTY-EIGHTH

*The Présidente de Tourvel to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**Y**ou seem surprised at my behaviour, Monsieur, and within an ace of asking me to account to you for it, as though you had the right to blame me. I confess that I should have thought it was rather I who was authorized to be astonished and to complain; but, since the refusal contained in your last letter, I have adopted the course of wrapping myself in an indifference which affords no ground for remarks or reproaches. However, as you ask me for enlightenment, and I, thanks be to Heaven, am conscious of nothing within me which should prevent my granting your request, I am quite willing to enter once more into an explanation with you.

Anyone reading your letters would believe me to be fantastic or unjust. I think it is not in my desserts that anyone should have this opinion of me; it seems to me, above all, that you, less than any other, have cause to form it. Doubtless, you felt that, in requiring my justification, you forced me to recall all that has passed between us. Apparently, you thought you had only to gain by this examination: as I, on my side, believe I have nothing to lose by it, at least in your eyes, I do not fear to undertake it. Perhaps, it is indeed the only means of discovering which of us has right to complain of the other.

To start, Monsieur, from the day of your arrival in this *château*, you will admit, I suppose, that your reputation, at least, authorized me to employ a certain reserve with you; and that I might have confined myself to the bare expression of the coldest politeness, without fearing to be taxed with excessive prudery. You yourself would have the necessary merits to appreciate yours. That, surely, had been the part of prudence; and it would have cost me the less to follow in that, I will not conceal from you, when Madame de Rosemonde informed me of your arrival, I had need to remind myself of my friendship for her, and of her own for you, not to betray how greatly this news annoyed me.

I admit willingly that you showed yourself at first under a more favourable aspect than I had imagined; but you will agree, in your turn, that it lasted but a little while, and you were soon tired of a constraint for which, apparently, you did not find yourself sufficiently compensated by the advantageous notion it had given me of you. It was then that, abusing my good faith, my feeling of security, you were not afraid to pester me with a sentiment by which you could not doubt but that I should be offended; and I, while you were occupied in aggravating your errors by repeating them, sought a reason for forgetting them, by offering you the opportunity of, at least in part, retrieving them. My request was so just that you yourself thought you ought not to refuse it; but making a right out of my indulgence, you profited by it to ask for a permission which, without a doubt, I ought not to have granted you, and which, however, you obtained. Conditions were attached to it: you have kept no one of them; and your correspondence has been of such a kind that each one of your letters made it my duty not to reply to you. It was at the very moment when your obstinacy was forcing me to send you away from me that, by a perhaps culpable condescension, I attempted the only means which could permit me to be concerned with you: but what value has virtuous sentiment in your eyes? Friendship you despise; and, in your mad intoxication,

counting shame and misery for naught, you seek only for pleasures and for victims.

As frivolous in your proceedings as inconsequent in your reproaches, you forget your promises, or rather you make a jest of violating them; and, after consenting to go away from me, you return here without being recalled; without thought for my prayers or my arguments; without even having the consideration to inform me, you were not afraid to expose me to a surprise whose effect, although assuredly very simple, might have been interpreted to my detriment by the persons who surrounded us. Far from seeking to distract from or to dissipate the moment of embarrassment you had occasioned, you seem to have given all your pains to increase it. At table you choose your seat precisely at the side of my own; a slight indisposition forces me to leave before the others, and, instead of respecting my solitude, you contrive that all the company should come to trouble it. On my return to the drawing-room, I cannot make a step but I find you at my side; if I say a word, it is always you who reply to me. The most indifferent remark serves you for a pretext to bring up a conversation which I refuse to hear, which might even compromise me; for, in short, Monsieur, whatever the address you may bring to bear, I think that what I understand may also be understood by the others.

Forced thus to take refuge in immobility and silence, you none the less continue to persecute me; I cannot raise my eyes without encountering yours. I am incessantly compelled to avert my gaze; and by an incomprehensible inconsequence you draw upon me the eyes of the company at a moment when I would have even wished it possible to escape from my own.

And you complain of my behaviour! and you are surprised at my eagerness to avoid you! Ah, blame rather my indulgence; be surprised that I did not leave at the moment of your arrival. I ought, perhaps, to have done so, and you will compel me to this violent but necessary course, if you do not finally cease your

offensive pursuit. No, I do not forget, I never shall forget what I owe to myself, what I owe to the ties I have formed, which I respect and cherish; and I pray you to believe that, if ever I found myself reduced to the unhappy choice of sacrificing them, or of sacrificing myself, I should not hesitate an instant. Adieu, Monsieur.

At the Château de..., 27th August, 17<sup>th</sup>.



## LETTER THE SEVENTY-NINTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil.*

I INTENDED to go hunting this morning : but the weather was detestable. All that I have to read is a new romance which would bore even a school-girl. It will be two hours, at the earliest, before we breakfast : so that, in spite of my long letter of yesterday, I will have another talk with you. I am very certain not to weary you, for I shall tell you of *the handsome Prévan*. How was it you never heard of his famous adventure, the one which separated the *inseparables* ? I wager that you will recall it at the first word. Here it is, however, since you desire it.

You will remember that all Paris marvelled that three women, all three pretty, all three with like qualities and able to make the same pretensions, should remain intimately allied among themselves, ever since the moment of their entry into the world. At first, one seemed to find the reason in their extreme shyness : but soon, surrounded, as they were, by a numerous court whose homages they shared, and enlightened as to their value by the eagerness and zeal of which they were the objects, their union only became the firmer ; and one would have said that the triumph of one was always that of the two others. One hoped at least that the

moment of love would lead to a certain rivalry. Our rakes disputed the honour of being the apple of discord; and I myself should have entered their ranks, had the great consideration in which the Comtesse de \*\*\* was held at the time permitted me to be unfaithful to her before I had obtained the favours I demanded.

However, our three beauties, during the same carnival, made their choice as though in concert; and, far from this exciting the storms which had been predicted, it oddly rendered their friendship more interesting, by the charm of the confidences entailed.

The crowd of unhappy suitors was added, then, to that of jealous women, and such scandalous constancy was held up to public censure. Some pretended that, in this society of *inseparables* (as it was dubbed at that time), the fundamental law was the community of goods, and that love itself was included therein; others asserted that, if the three lovers were exempt from rivals of their own sex, they were not from those of the other: people went so far as to say that they had but been admitted for decency's sake, and had obtained only a title without an office.

These rumours, true or false, had not the effect which one would have predicted. The three couples, on the contrary, felt that they were lost if they separated at such a moment; they decided to set their heads against the storm. The public, which tires of everything, soon tired of an ineffectual satire. Borne on the wings of its natural levity, it busied itself with other objects: then, casting back to that one with its habitual inconsequence, its criticism was converted into praise. As all things go by fashion here, the enthusiasm gained; it had become a real delirium, when Prévan undertook to verify these prodigies, and settle the public opinion about them, as well as his own.

He sought out therefore these models of perfection. He was easily admitted into their society, and drew a favourable omen from this. He was well aware that happy persons are not so easy of access. He soon saw, in fact, that this so vaunted happiness was, like that

of kings, rather to be envied than desired. He remarked that, amongst these pretended inseparables, they were beginning to seek for pleasures abroad, and even to occupy themselves with distractions; and he concluded therefrom, that the bonds of love or friendship were already loosened or broken, and that those of self-conceit and custom alone retained some strength. The women, however, whose need brought them together, kept up amongst themselves an appearance of the same intimacy: but the men, who were freer in their proceedings, discovered duties to fulfil, or affairs to carry on; they still complained of these, but no longer neglected them, and the evenings were rarely complete.

This conduct on their part was profitable to the assiduous Prévau, who, being naturally placed beside the deserted one of the day, found a means of offering alternately, and according to circumstances, the same homage to each of the three friends. He could easily perceive that to make a choice between them was to lose everything; that false shame at proving the first to be unfaithful would make the preferred one afraid; that the wounded vanity of the two others would render them the enemies of the new lover, and that they would not fail to oppose him with the severity of their high principles; in short, that jealousy would surely revive the zeal of a rival who might be still to fear. Everything would be an obstacle; in his triple project all became easy; each woman was indulgent because she was interested in it; each man, because he thought that he was not.

Prévau, who had, at that time, but one woman to sacrifice, was lucky enough to see her become a celebrity. Her quality of foreigner, and the homage of a great Prince, adroitly refused, had fixed on her the eyes of the Court and the Town; her lover participated in the honour, and profited from it with his new mistresses. The only difficulty was to conduct his three intrigues at an equal pace; their progress had, of course, to be regulated by that of the one which lagged the most; in fact, I heard from one of his confidants, that

his greatest difficulty was to hold in hand one which was ripe for gathering, nearly a fortnight before the rest.

At last the great day arrived. Prévau, who had obtained the three avowals, was already master of the situation, and arranged it as you will see. Of the three husbands, one was absent, the other was leaving the next day at day-break, the third was in town. The inseparable friends were to sup at the future widow's; but the new master had not permitted the former gallants to be invited there. On the morning of that very day, he divided the letters of his fair into three lots; he enclosed in one her portrait which he had received from her, in the second an amorous device which she had painted herself, in the third a tress of her hair; each of the friends received this third of a sacrifice as the whole, and consented, in return, to send to her disgraced lover a signal letter of rupture.

This was much; but it was not enough. She whose husband was in Town could only excuse of the day; it was arranged that a pretended indisposition should excuse her from going to supper with her friend, and that the evening should be given entirely to Prévau; the night was granted by her whose husband was absent; and day-break, the moment of the departure of the third spouse, was appointed by the last for the shepherd's hour.

Prévau, who neglected nothing, next hastened to the fair foreigner, brought there and aroused the ill humour which he required, and only left after having brought about a quarrel which assured him four-and-twenty hours of liberty. His dispositions thus made, he returned home, intending to take some hours' repose. Other business was awaiting him.

The letters of rupture had brought a flash of light to the disgraced lovers: none of them had any doubt but that he had been sacrificed to Prévau; and spite at being tricked uniting with the ill-humour which is almost always engendered by the petty humiliation of being deserted, all three, without communicating with one another, but as though in concert, resolved to have satisfaction,

and took the course of demanding it from their fortunate rival.

The latter found the three challenges awaiting him; he accepted them loyally, but not wishing to sacrifice either his pleasures or the glamour of this adventure, he fixed the *rendez-vous* for the following morning, and gave all three assignations at the same place and the same hour. It was at one of the gates of the Bois de Boulogne.

When evening came, he ran his triple course with equal success; at least, he boasted subsequently that each one of his new mistresses had received three times the wage and declaration of his love. In this, as you may imagine, proofs are lacking to history; all that the impartial historian can do is to point out to the incredulous reader that vanity and exalted imagination can beget prodigies; nay more, that the morning which was to follow so brilliant a night seemed to promise a dispensation from all concern for the future. Be that as it may, the facts which follow are more authentic.

Prévan repaired punctually to the *rendez-vous* which he had selected: he found there his three rivals, somewhat surprised at meeting, and each of them, perhaps, a trifle consoled at the sight of his companions in misfortune. He accosted them with a blunt but affable air, and used this language to them—it has been faithfully reported to me:

“Gentlemen,” said he, “as I find you all here together, you have doubtless divined that you have all three the same cause of complaint against me. I am ready to give you satisfaction. Let chance decide between you which of the three shall first attempt a vengeance to which you have all an equal right. I have brought with me neither second nor witnesses. I did not include any in my offence; I seek none in my reparation.” Then, in accordance with his character as a gambler, he added, “I know one rarely wins three hands running; but, whatever fortune may befall me, one has lived long enough when one has had time enough to win the love of women and the esteem of men.”

Whilst his astonished adversaries looked at one another in silence, and in delicacy, perhaps, reflected that this triple contest rendered the game hardly fair, Prévau resumed :

"I do not hide from you that the night which I have just passed has cruelly fatigued me. It would be generous of you to permit me to recruit my strength. I have given orders for a breakfast to be served on the ground ; do me the honour to partake of it. Let us breakfast together, and, above all, let us breakfast gaily. One can fight for such trifles ; but they ought not, I think, to spoil our good humour."

The breakfast was accepted. Never, it is said, was Prévau more amiable. He was skilled enough to avoid humiliating any one of his rivals, to persuade them that they would have easily had a like success, and, above all, to make them admit that, no more than he, would they have let the occasion slip. These facts once admitted, everything arranged itself. The breakfast was not finished before they had repeated a dozen times that such women did not deserve that men of honour should fight for them. This idea promoted cordiality ; it was so well fortified by wine that, a few moments later, it was not enough merely to bear no more ill-will : they swore an unreserved friendship.

Prévau, who doubtless liked this *dénouement* as well as the other, would not for that, however, lose any of his celebrity. In consequence, adroitly adapting his plans to circumstances : "In truth," he said to the three victims, "it is not on me but on your faithless mistresses that you should take revenge. I offer you the opportunity. I begin to feel already, like yourselves, an injury which would soon be my share : for if none of you could succeed in retaining a single one, how can I hope to retain all three ? Your quarrel becomes my own. Accept a supper this evening at my *petite maison*, and I hope your vengeance may not be long postponed." They wished to make him explain : but, with that tone of superiority which the circumstances authorized him to adopt, he

answered, "Gentlemen, I think I have proved to you that my conduct is founded on a certain wit; trust in me." All consented; and, after having embraced their new friend, they separated till the evening to await the issue of his promises.

Prévan return to Paris without wasting time, and goes, according to the usage, to visit his new conquests. He obtained a promise from each to come the same evening and sup *tête-à-tête* at his pleasure-house. Two of them raised a few objections; but what can one refuse on the day after? He fixed the *rendez-vous* for a late hour, time being necessary for his plans. After these preparations he retired, sent word to the other three conspirators, and all four went gaily to await their victims.

The first is heard arriving. Prévan comes forward alone, receives her with an air of alacrity, conducts her into the sanctuary of which she believed herself to be the divinity; then, disappearing under some slight pretext, he allows himself to be forthwith replaced by the outraged lover.

You may guess how the confession of a woman who had not yet the habit of adventures rendered triumph easy; any reproach not made was counted for a grace; and the truant slave, once more handed over to her former master, was only too happy to be able to hope for pardon by resuming her former chain. The treaty of peace was ratified in a more solitary place, and the empty stage was successively filled by the other actors in almost the same fashion, and always with the same result. Each of the women, however, still thought herself to be alone in her adventure. Their astonishment and embarrassment increased when, at supper-time, the three couples were united; but confusion reached its height when Prévan, reappearing in their midst, had the cruelty to make his excuses to the three faithless ones, which, by revealing their secret, told them completely to what a point they had been fooled.

However, they went to table, and soon afterwards countenances cleared; the men gave themselves up, the women submitted. All

had hatred in their hearts; but the conversation was none the less tender; gaiety aroused desire, which, in its turn, lent to gaiety fresh charm. This astounding orgy lasted until morning; and, when they separated, the women had expected to be pardoned; but the men, who had retained their resentment, made on the following morning a rupture which was never healed; and, not content with leaving their fickle mistresses, they sealed their vengeance by making their adventure public. Since that time one has gone into a convent, and the two other languish in exile on their estates.

That is the story of Prévau; it is for you to say whether you wish to add to his glory, and tie yourself to his car of triumph. Your letter has really given me some anxiety, and I await impatiently a more prudent and clearer reply to the last I wrote you.

Adieu, my fair friend; distrust those queer or amusing ideas which too easily seduce you. Remember that, in the career which you are leading, wit alone does not suffice; one single imprudence becomes an irremediable ill. In short, allow a prudent friendship to be sometimes the guide of your pleasures.

Adieu. I love you nevertheless, just as much as though you were reasonable.

At the Château de . . . , 18th September, 1777.



## LETTER THE EIGHTIETH

### *The Chevalier Danceny to Cécile Volanges*

CÉCILE, my dear Cécile, when will the time come for us to meet again? How shall I learn to live afar from you? Who will give me the courage and the strength? Never, never shall I be able to support this fatal absence. Each day adds to my unhappiness: and there is no term to look forward to!

Valmont, who had promised me help and consolation, Valmont neglects and, perhaps, forgets me! He is near the object of his love; he forgets what one feels when one is parted from it. When forwarding your last letter to me, he did not write to me. It is he, however, who should tell me when, and by what means, I shall be able to see you. Has he nothing then to tell me? You yourself do not speak of it to me; could it be that you do not participate in my desire? Ah, Cécile, Cécile, I am very unhappy? I love you more than ever: but this love which makes the charm of my life becomes its torture.

No, I can no longer live thus; I must see you, I must, were it only for a moment. When I rise, I say to myself: I shall not see her. I lie down saying: I have not seen her.... The long, long days contain no moment of happiness. All is privation, regret, despair;

and all these ills come to me from the source whence I expected every pleasure! Add to these mortal pains my anxiety about yours, and you will have an idea of my situation. I think of you uninterruptedly, and never without dismay. If I see you afflicted, unhappy, I suffer for all your sorrows; if I see you calm and consoled, my own are redoubled. Everywhere I find unhappiness.

Ah, how different it was from this, when you dwelt in the same places as I did! All was pleasure then. The certainty of seeing you embellished even the moments of absence; the time which had to be passed away from you glided away as it brought you nearer to me. The use I made of it was never unknown to you. If I fulfilled my duties, they rendered me more worthy of you; if I cultivated any talent, I hoped the more to please you. Even when the distractions of the world carried me far away from you, I was not parted from you. At the play-house I sought to divine what would have pleased you; a concert reminded me of your talents and our sweet occupations. In company, on my walks, I seized upon the slightest resemblance. I compared you with all; everywhere you had the advantage. Every moment of the day was marked by fresh homage, and every evening I brought the tribute of it, to your feet.

Nowadays, what remains to me? Dolorous regrets, eternal privations, and a faint hope that Valmont's silence may be broken, that yours shall be changed to inquietude. Ten leagues alone divide us, and that distance, so easy to traverse, becomes to me an insurmountable obstacle! And when I implore my friend, my mistress, to help me to overcome it, both remain cold and unmoved! Far from aiding me, they do not even reply.

What has become then of the active friendship of Valmont? What, above all, has become of your tender sentiments, which made you so ingenious in discovering the means of our daily meetings? Sometimes, I remember, without ceasing to desire them, I found myself compelled to forego them for considerations,

duties; what did you not say to me then? With how many pretexts did you not combat my reasons? And let me remind you, my Cécile, my reasons always gave way to your wishes. I do not make a merit of it; it has not even that of sacrifice. What you desired to obtain I was burning to bestow. But now I ask in my turn; and what is the request? To see you for a moment, to renew and to receive a vow of eternal love. Does that no longer make your happiness as it makes mine? I thrust aside that despairing idea, which would set the crown upon my ills. You love me, you will always love me, I believe it, I am sure of it, I will never doubt it; but my situation is frightful, and I cannot endure it much longer. Adieu, Cécile.

Paris, 11th September, 1777.

## LETTER THE EIGHTY-FIRST

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

**H**ow your fears excite my pity! How they prove to me my superiority over you! And you want to teach me, to be my guide? Ah, my poor Valmont, what a distance there is between you and me! No, all the pride of your sex would not suffice to bridge over the gulf which separates us. Because you could not execute my projects, you judge them impossible! Proud and weak being, it well becomes you to seek to weigh my means and judge of my resources! In truth, Vicomte, your counsels have put me in an ill-humour, and I will not conceal it from you.

That, to mask your incredible stupidity with your Presidente, you should blazon out to me, as a triumph, the fact of your having for a moment put out of countenance this woman who is timid and who loves you: I agree to that; of having obtained a look, a single look: I smile, and grant it you. That, feeling, in spite of yourself, the poor value of your conduct, you should hope to distract my attention from it by gratifying me with the story of your sublime effort to bring together two children who are both burning to see one another, and who, I may mention by the way, owe to me alone the ardour of their desire: I grant you that also. That, finally,

you should feel authorized by these brilliant achievements to write to me, in dictatorial tones, *that it is better to employ one's time in carrying out one's projects than in describing them*: such vanity does me no harm and I forgive it. But that you could believe that I had need of your prudence, that I should lose my way unless I deferred to your advice, that I ought to sacrifice a pleasure or a whim: in truth, Vicomte, that is indeed to plume yourself overmuch on the confidence which I am quite willing to place in you!

And, pray, what have you done that I have not surpassed a thousand times? You have seduced, ruined even, very many women: but what difficulties have you had to overcome? What obstacles to surmount? What merit lies therein that is really your own? A handsome face, the pure result of chance; graces, which habit almost always brings; wit, in truth: but jargon would supply its place at need; a praiseworthy impudence, perhaps due solely to the ease of your first successes; if I am not mistaken, these are your means, for, as for the celebrity you have succeeded in acquiring, you will not ask me, I suppose, to count for much the art of giving birth to a scandal or seizing the opportunity of one.

As for prudence, *finesse*, I do not speak of myself: but where is the woman who has not more than you? Why, your Présidente leads you like a child!

Believe me, Vicomte, it is rarely one acquires qualities which cannot be dispensed with. Fighting without risk, you are bound to act without precaution. For you men, a defeat is but one success the less. In so unequal a match, we are fortunate if we do not lose, as it is your misfortune if you do not win. Even were I to grant you as many talents as ourselves, by how many should we not still need to surpass you, from the necessity we are under to make a perpetual use of them!

Supposing, I admit, that you brought as much skill to the task

of conquering us as we show in defending ourselves or in yielding, you will at least agree that it becomes useless to you after your success. Absorbed solely in your new fancy, you abandon yourself to it without fear, without reserve : it is not to you that its duration is important.

In fact, those bonds reciprocally given and received, to talk love's jargon, you alone can lighten or break at your will : we are even lucky if, in your wantonness, preferring mystery to noise, you are satisfied with an humiliating desertion, without making the idol of yesterday the victim of to-morrow.

But when an unfortunate woman has once felt the weight of her chain, what risks she has to run, if she but endeavours to shake it off ! It is only with trembling that she can attempt to dismiss from her the man whom her heart repulses with violence. Does he insist on remaining, she must yield to fear what she had granted to love :

*“ Ses bras s'ouvrent encore quand son cœur est fermé. ”*

Her prudence must skillfully unravel those same bonds which you would have broken. At the mercy of her enemy, if he be without generosity, she is without resources : and how can she hope for generosity from him when, although he is sometimes praised for having it, he is never blamed for lacking it ?

Doubtless, you will not deny these truths, which are so evident as to have become trivial. If, however, you have seen me, disposing of opinions and events, making these formidable men the toys of my fantasy and my fickle fancy, how to attach to my service or drive far away from me

*“ Ces tyrans détronés devenus mes esclaves ; ”*

if in the midst of these frequent revolutions my reputation has still remained pure ; ought you not to have concluded that, being born to avenge my sex and to dominate yours, I had devised methods previously unknown ?

Oh ! keep your advice and your fears for those delirious women

who call themselves *sentimental*; whose exalted imagination would make one believe that nature has placed their senses in their heads; who, having never reflected, persist in confounding love with the lover; who, in their mad illusion, believe that he with whom they have pursued pleasure is its sole depository; and, truly superstitious, show the priest the respect and faith which is only due to the divinity. Be still more afraid for those who, their vanity being larger than their prudence, do not know, at need, how to consent to being abandoned. Tremble, above all, for those women, active in their indolence, whom you call *women of sensibility*, and over whom love takes hold so easily and with such power; who feel the need of being occupied with it, even when they are not enjoying it; and, giving themselves up unreservedly to the fermentation of their ideas, bring forth from them those letters so sweet, but so dangerous to write, and are not afraid to confide these proofs of their weakness to the object which causes it: imprudent ones, who do not know how to discern in their present lover their enemy to be.

But what have I in common with these unreflecting women? When have you ever seen me depart from the rules I have laid down, or be false to my principles? I say my principles, and I say so designedly; for they are not, like those of other women, the result of chance, received without scrutiny, and followed out of habit; they are the fruit of my profound reflexions; I have created them, and I may say that I am my own handiwork.

Entering the world at a time when, still a girl, I was compelled by my condition to be silent and inert, I knew how to profit by observing and reflecting. Whilst I was thought heedless or inattentive, and, in truth, listened little to the remarks that they were careful to make to me, I carefully gathered up those which they sought to hide from me.

This useful curiosity, while serving to instruct me, also taught me dissimulation; often forced to conceal the objects of my attention

from the eyes of those who surrounded me, I sought to direct my own whither I desired; I learned then how to assume at will that remote look which you have so often praised. Encouraged by this first success, I tried to govern equally the different movements of my face. Did I experience some vexation, I studied to assume an air of serenity, even of joy; I have carried my 'zeal so far as to inflict voluntary pain on myself, in order to seek, at that time, an expression of pleasure. I laboured, with the same care and greater difficulty, to repress the symptoms of unexpected joy. It was thus that I gained that command over my physiognomy at which I have sometimes seen you so astonished.

I was very young still, and almost without interest: my thoughts were all that I had, and I was indignant that these should be stolen from me or surprised against my will. Armed with these first weapons, I amused myself by showing myself under different forms. Sure of my gestures, I kept a watch upon my speech; I regulated both according to circumstances, or even merely according to my whim; from that moment the colour of my thought was my secret, and I never revealed more of it than it was useful for me to show.

This labour spent upon myself had fixed my attention on the expression of faces and the character of physiognomy; and I thus gained that penetrating glance to which experience, indeed, has taught me not to trust entirely, but which, on the whole, has rarely deceived me. I was not fifteen years old, I possessed already the talents to which the greater part of our politicians owe their reputation, and I was as yet only at the rudiments of the science which I wished to acquire. You may well imagine that, like all young girls, I sought to find out about love and its pleasures; but having never been to the convent, having no confidential friend, and being watched by a vigilant mother, I had only vague notions, which I could not fix; even nature, which later, I had, assuredly, no reason to do aught but praise, as yet afforded me no hint. One might have said that it was working in silence at the



perfection of its handiwork. My head alone was in a ferment ; I did not desire enjoyment, I wanted to know : the desire for information suggested to me the means.

I felt that the only man with whom I could speak on this matter without compromising myself was my confessor. I took my course at once ; I surmounted my slight feeling of shame ; and vaunting myself for a sin which I had not committed, I accused myself of having done *all that women do*. That was my expression ; but, in speaking so, I did not know, in truth, what idea I was expressing. My hope was not altogether deceived, nor entirely fulfilled ; the fear of betraying myself prevented me from enlightening myself ; but the good father represented the ill as so great that I concluded the pleasure to be extreme ; and to the desire of knowing it the desire of tasting it succeeded.

I do not know whither this desire would have led me ; and, devoid of experience as I was at that time, perhaps a single opportunity would have ruined me : luckily for me, my mother informed me, a few days later, that I was to be married ; the certainty of knowing extinguished my curiosity at once, and I came a virgin to the arms of M. de Merteuil.

I waited with calmness for the moment which was to enlighten me, and I had need of reflexion, in order to exhibit embarrassment and fear. The first night, of which ordinarily one entertains an idea so painful or so sweet, presented itself to me only as an occasion of experience : pain and pleasure, I observed all carefully, and saw in these different sensations only facts upon which to reflect and meditate. This form of study soon succeeded in pleasing me : but, faithful to my principles, and feeling by instinct perhaps that no one ought to be further from my confidence than my husband, I resolved to appear the more impassive in his eyes, the more sensible I really was. This [apparent coldness was subsequently the impregnable foundation of his blind confidence ; as a second reflection, I joined to it the mischievous air which my age

justified; and he never thought me more of a child than when I was tricking him most.

Meanwhile, I will admit, I, at first, let myself be dragged into the vortex of society, and gave myself up completely to its futile distractions. But, after some months, M. de Merteuil having taken me to his dismal country estate, the dread of *ennui* revived the taste for study in me: and as I found myself there surrounded by people whose distance from me put me out of the reach of all suspicion, I profited by it to give a vaster field to my experience. It was there especially that I assured myself that love, which they vaunt to us as the cause of our pleasures, is, at the most, only the pretext for them.

The illness of M. de Merteuil came to interrupt these sweet occupations; it was necessary to follow him to Town, where he went to seek for aid. He died, as you know, shortly afterwards; and although, considering all things, I had no complaint to make against him, I had, none the less, a lively feeling of the value of the liberty which my widowhood would give me, and I promised myself to take advantage of it. My mother calculated on my entering a convent, or returning to live with her. I refused to take either course, and all I granted to decency, was to go back to the same country estate, where there were still some observations left for me to make.

I supplemented these with the help of reading: but do not imagine it was all of the kind you suppose. I studied our manners in novels, our opinions in the philosophers; I even went to the most severe moralists to see what they expected from us; and I thus made sure of what one could do, of what one ought to think, and of how one must appear. My mind once settled upon these three matters, the last alone presented any difficulties in its execution; I hoped to overcome them, and I meditated on the means.

began to grow tired of my rustic pleasures, which were not

varied enough for my active brain; I felt the need of coquetry, which should reunite me to love, not in order that I might really feel it, but to feign and inspire it. In vain had I been told, and had I read, that one could not feign this sentiment: I saw that, to succeed there, it sufficed to join the talent of a comedian to an author's wit. I exercised myself in both kinds, and, perhaps with some success: but, instead of seeking the vain applause of the theatre, I resolved to employ for my happiness that which so many others sacrificed to vanity.

A year passed in these different occupations. My mourning then allowing me to reappear, I returned to Town with my great projects; I was not prepared for the first obstacle which I encountered.

My long solitude and austere retreat had covered me with a veneer of prudery which frightened our *beaux*; they kept their distance, and left me at the mercy of a crowd of tedious fellows, who all were aspirants for my hand. The embarrassment did not lie in refusing them; but many of these refusals displeased my family, and in these internal disputes I lost the time of which I had promised myself to make such charming use. I was obliged, then, in order to recall some and drive away the others, to display certain inconsistencies, and to take as much pains in damaging my reputation as I had thought to take in preserving it. I succeeded easily, as you may believe: but, being carried away by no passion, I only did what I thought necessary, and measured out my doses of indiscretion with caution.

As soon as I had touched the goal which I would attain, I retraced my steps, and gave the honour of my amendment to some of those women who, being impotent as far as any pretensions to charm are concerned, fall back on those of merit and virtue. This was a move which was of more value to me than I had hoped. These grateful duennas set themselves up as my apologists; and their blind zeal for what they called their work was carried to such an extent that, at the least reflexion which might be made on me,

the whole party of prudes cried scandal and outrage. The same method procured me also the suffrages of the women with pretensions, who, being persuaded that I had renounced the thought of following the same career as theirs, selected me as a subject for their praise, each time they wished to prove that they did not speak ill of all the world.

Meanwhile, my previous conduct had brought back the lovers; and to compromise between them and the unfaithful women who had become my patronesses, I passed as a woman of sensibility, but rigour, whom the excess of her delicacy furnished with arms against love.

I then began to display upon the great stage the talents which had been given me. My first care was to acquire the reputation of being invincible. To attain it, the men who did not please me were always the only ones whose homage I had the air of accepting. I employed them usefully to obtain for me the honours of resistance, whilst to the preferred lover I abandoned myself without fear. But the latter my pretended shyness never permitted to follow me in the world; and the gaze of society has thus been always fixed on the unhappy lover.

You know with what rapidity I choose: it is because I have observed that it is nearly always the previous attentions which disclose a woman's secret. Whatever one may say, the tone is never the same before and after success. This difference does not escape the attentive observer; and I have found it less dangerous to be deceived in my choice than to let that choice be penetrated. I gain here again by removing probabilities, by which alone we can be judged.

These precautions and that of never writing, of never giving any proof of my defeat, might appear excessive, and to me have ever appeared insufficient. I have looked into my own heart, I have studied in it the heart of others. I saw there that there is nobody who does not keep a secret there which it is of importance

for him not to divulge: a truth which antiquity seems to have known better than we, and of which the history of Samson might be no more than an ingenious symbol. Like a new Delilah, I have always employed my power in surprising this important secret. Ah, of how many of our modern Samsons have not the locks<sup>2</sup> fallen beneath my shears? And these, I have ceased to fear them; they are the only ones whom I have sometimes permitted myself to humiliate. More supple with the others, the art of rendering them unfaithful lest I should appear to them fickle, a feint of friendship, an appearance of confidence, a few generous measures, the flattering notion, which each one retains, of having been my only lover, have secured me their discretion. Finally, when these methods failed me, foreseeing the rupture, I knew how to crush in advance, beneath ridicule or calumny, the credence which these dangerous men could have obtained.

All this which I tell you, you have seen me practise unceasingly; and you doubt of my prudence! Ah, indeed! recall to mind the time when you paid me your first attentions: no homage was ever more flattering to me; I desired you before I had ever seen you. Seduced by your reputation, it seemed to me that you were wanting to my glory; I burned with a desire for a hand-to-hand combat with you. It is the only one of my fancies which ever had a moment's empire over me. However, if you had wished to destroy me, what means would you have found? Empty talk which leaves no trace behind it, which your very reputation would have helped to render suspect, and a tissue of improbable facts, the sincere relation of which would have had the air of a badly conceived novel. It is true, since that time, I have handed you over all my secrets: but you know what interests unite us, and that, if it be one of us, it is not I who can be taxed with imprudence.

Since I have started off to render account to you, I will do it precisely. I hear you tell me now that I am at any rate at the mercy of my chamber-maid; in fact, if she is not in the secret of my

sentiments, she is of my actions. When you spoke of it to me once before, I answered that I was sure of her; and my proof that this reply was sufficient then for your tranquillity is that you have since confided to her mighty dangerous secrets of your own. But, now that you have taken umbrage at Prévau, and that your head is turned, I doubt whether you will believe me any more on my word. I must therefore edify you.

In the first place, the girl is my foster-sister, and this bond, which does not seem one to us, is not without force amongst people of her condition: in addition, I have her secret and better still, the victim of a love-madness, she was ruined, if I had not saved her. Her parents, bristling with honour, would be satisfied by nothing less than her imprisonment. They applied to me. I saw at a glance how useful their anger might be made to me. I seconded them and solicited the order, which I obtained. Then, suddenly turning to the side of clemency, to which I persuaded her parents, and profiting by my influence with the old minister, I made them all consent to make me the depositary of this order, free to stay it or demand its execution, according to the judgment I should form of the girl's future conduct. She knows, then, that I have her fate within my hands; and if, to assume the impossible, these potent reasons should not prevent her, is it not evident that the revelation of her conduct and her authentic punishment would soon deprive her language of all credit?

To these precautions, which I call fundamental, are joined a thousand others, local or occasional, which habit and reflexion allow me to find at need; of which the details would be tedious, although their practice is important; and which you must take the trouble to pick out from the general view of my conduct, if you would succeed in knowing them.

But to pretend that I have been at so much pains, and am not to cull the fruit of them; that, after having raised myself, by my arduous labours, so high above other women, I am to consent to

groped along, like them, betwixt imprudence and timidity; that, above all, I should fear any man to such an extent as to see no other salvation than in flight? No, Vicomte, never! I must conquer or perish. As for Prévan, I wish to have him, and I shall have him; he wishes to tell of it, and he shall not tell of it; that, in two words, is our little romance. Adieu.

Paris, 20th September, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE EIGHTY-SECOND

*Cécile Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny*

**A**n, God, what pain your letter gave me! I need well have felt such impatience to receive it! I hoped to find in it consolation, and here am I more afflicted than I was ere I received it. I shed many tears when I read it: it is not that with which I reproach you; I have already wept many times because of you, without its being painful to me. But this time, it is not the same thing.

What is it that you wish to say, pray? that your love is grown a torment to you, that you can no longer live thus, nor any more support your situation? Do you mean that you are going to cease to love me, because it is not so agreeable as it used to be? It seems to me that I am no happier than you are, quite the contrary; and yet I only love you the more for that. If M. de Valmont has not written to you, it is not my fault; I could not beg him to, because I have not been alone with him, and we have agreed that we would never speak before people: and that again is for your sake, so that he can the better do what you desire. I do not say that I do not desire it also, and you ought to be assured of this: but what would you have me do? If you believe it to be so easy, please find the means, I ask nothing better.



Do you think it is so very agreeable for me to be scolded every day by Mamma, who once never said anything to me? Quite the contrary. Now it is worse than if I were at the convent. I consoled myself for it, however, by reflecting that it was for you; there were even moments when I found I was quite content; but when I see that you are vexed too, without its being in the least my fault, I have more grief than I had for all that has hitherto happened to me.

Even merely to receive your letters is embarrassing, so that, if M. de Valmont were not so obliging and so clever as he is, I should not know what to do; and, as to writing to you, that is more difficult still. All the morning I dare not, because Mamma is close by me, and she may come, at any moment, into my room. Sometimes, I am able to, in the afternoon, under pretence of singing or playing on the harp; even then I have to interrupt myself after every line, to let them hear I am studying. Luckily my waiting-maid sometimes grows sleepy in the evening, and I tell her that I can quite well get to bed by myself, so that she may go away and leave me the light. And then, I am obliged to get behind my curtain, so that no light can be seen; and then, to listen for the least sound, so that I can hide everything in my bed, if anyone comes. I wish you were there to see! You would soon see that one must indeed love anyone to do it. In short, it is quite true that I do all that I can, and I would it lay within my power to do more.

Certainly, I do not refuse to tell you that I love you, and that I shall always love you; I never told it you with a fuller heart; and you are vexed! Yet you had assured me, before I said it, that that was enough to make you happy. You cannot deny it; it is in your letters. Although I have them no longer, I remember them as well as when I used to read them every day. And you, because you are absent now, no longer think the same! But perhaps this absence will not always last? Ah, God, how unhappy I am! And it is indeed you who are the cause of it!...

With regard to your letters, I hope that you have kept those which Mamma took from me, and which she sent back to you; a time must come, some day, when I shall not be so restrained as at present, and you will give them all back to me. How happy I shall be when I am able to see them! Now I return them to M. de Valmont, because there would be too much danger otherwise; in spite of that, I never give them to him without feeling a deal of pain.

Adieu, my dear friend. I love you with all my heart. I shall love you all my life. I hope that now you are no longer vexed, and, were I sure of it, I should not be so myself. Write; till then I shall continue sad.

At the Château de . . . , 14th September, 17'.

## LETTER THE EIGHTY-THIRD

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Présidente de Tourvel.*

**F**OR mercy's sake, Madame, let us repeat that interview which was so unhappily broken! Oh, that I could complete my work of proving to you how much I differ from the odious portrait which has been made of me; that, above all, I could again enjoy that amiable confidence which you began to grant me! How many are the charms with which you know how to endow virtue! How you beautify, and render dear, every virtuous sentiment! Ah, therein lies your fascination; it is the strongest; it is the only one which is at once powerful and worthy of respect.

Doubtless, it is enough to see you to desire to [please you; to hear you in company for that desire to be redoubled. But he who has the happiness of knowing you better, who can sometimes read in your soul, soon yields to a more noble enthusiasm, and, penetrated by veneration as by love, worships in you the image of all the virtues. Better made than another, perhaps, to love and follow them, although seduced by certain errors which had separated me from them, it is you who have brought me back, who have caused me to feel anew all their charm: will you make a crime of this new love of mine? Will you blame your handiwork? Would you

reproach yourself even with the interest which you might take in it! What harm is to be feared from so pure a sentiment, and what sweetness might there not be to taste in it?

My love alarms you, you find it violent, unrestrained! Temper it with a gentler love; do not disdain the empire which I offer you, from which I swear never to escape, and which, I dare believe, would not be entirely lost to virtue. What sacrifice could seem hard to me, once sure that your heart could keep its price for me? Where is the man, then, who is so unhappy as not to know how to delight in the privations which he imposes on himself, as not to prefer a word, a glance, accorded, to all the pleasures which he could steal or surprise? And you believed that I was such a man, and you feared me! Ah, why does not your happiness depend on my own! What vengeance I would take on you, by rendering you happy! But this gentle empire is no result of a barren friendship; it is only due to love.

That word frightens you! And why? A more tender attachment, a stronger union, a common thought, a like happiness and a like pain, what is there in that alien to your soul? Yet love is all that! Such, at least, is the love which you inspire and I experience. It is that, above all, which, calculating without interest, knows how to appreciate actions according to their merit and not their price; it is the inexhaustible treasure of sensitive souls, and all things become precious that are done for or by it.

What, then, have these truths, so easy to grasp, so sweet to practice, that can alarm? What fear, either, can a man of sensibility cause you, to whom love permits no other happiness than your own? This is the solitary vow I make to-day: I will sacrifice all to fulfil it, except the sentiment by which it is inspired; and this sentiment itself, if you do but consent to share it, you shall order as you will. But let us suffer it no longer to divide us, when it should unite us. If the friendship you have offered me is not an idle word; if, as you told me yesterday, it is the sweetest sentiment

known to your soul, let that be the bond between us; I will not reject it: but, being arbiter of love, let it consent to listen to it; a refusal to hear it would become an injustice, and friendship is not unjust.

A second interview will present no greater difficulty than the first: chance can again furnish the occasion; you could yourself indicate the right moment. I am willing to believe that I am wrong; would you not be better pleased to convince me than to combat me, and do you doubt my docility? If that inopportune third party had not come to interrupt us, perhaps I had already been brought round entirely to your opinion: who knows the full extent of your power?

Shall I say it to you? This invincible power, to which I abandon myself without venturing on calculation, this irresistible charm, which renders you sovereign of my thoughts as of my actions: I sometimes fear them. Alas, perhaps it is I who should be afraid of this interview for which I ask! After it, perhaps, bound by my promises, I shall see myself compelled to consume away with a love which, I am well aware, can never be extinguished, without daring to implore your aid! Ah, Madame, for mercy's sake, do not abuse your authority! But what then! if you are to be the happier for it, if I am thereby to appear worthier of you, what pains are not alleviated by these consoling ideas! Yes, I feel it; to speak again with you is to give you stronger arms against me; it is to submit myself more entirely to your will! It is easier to defend myself against your letters; they are indeed your very utterances, but you are not there to lend them fresh strength. However, the pleasure of hearing you leads me to brave the danger: at least I shall have the pleasure of having dared everything for you, even against myself; and my sacrifices will become an homage. I am too happy to prove to you in a thousand manners, as I feel in a thousand fashions, that you are and ever will be, not even excepting myself, the object dearest to my heart.

At the Château de . . . , 23rd September, 1777.

## LETTER THE EIGHTY-FOURTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to Cécile Volanges*

**Y**ou saw how greatly chance was against us yesterday. All day long I was unable to hand you the letter which I had for you; I know not whether I shall find it any easier to-day. I am afraid of compromising you, by showing more zeal than discretion; and I should never forgive myself for an imprudence which might prove so fatal to you, and cause the despair of my friend, by rendering you eternally miserable. However, I am aware of the impatience of love; I feel how painful it must be to you, in your situation, to meet with any delay in the only consolation you can know at this moment. By dint of busying myself with the means of removing the obstacles, I have found one, the execution of which, if you take some pains, will be easy.

I think I have remarked that the key of the door of your chamber, which opens into the corridor, is always on your Mamma's mantel-shelf. Everything would be easy with this key, you must be well aware; but in default of it, I will procure you one like it, which will serve in its stead. To succeed in this, it will be sufficient to have the other at my disposition for an hour or two. You will easily find an opportunity for taking it: and, an order that its

absence may may not be noticed, I enclose, in this, one of my own which is so far like it that no difference will be seen, unless they try it; this they are not likely to do. You must only take care to tie it to a faded blue ribbon, like that which is on your own.

It would be well to try and have this key by to-morrow or the day after at breakfast-time; because it will be easier for you to give it to me then, and it can be returned to its place in the evening, a time when your Mamma might pay more attention to it. I shall be able to return it to you at dinner-time, if we arrange well.

You know that, when we move from the *salon* to the dining-room, it is always Madame de Rosemonde who walks last. I shall give her my hand. You will only have to take some time in putting away your tapestry, or even to let something drop, so that you may remain behind: you will see then how to take the key from me, which I shall be careful to hold behind me. You must not neglect, as soon as you have taken it, to rejoin my old aunt and pay her a few attentions. If by chance you should let the key fall, do not lose your countenance; I will feign that it was done by me, and I answer for everything.

The lack of confidence your Mamma shows in you, and her harsh behaviour towards you, authorize this little deception. It is, moreover, the only way to continue to receive the letters of Danceny, and to forward him yours; all others are really too dangerous and might ruin you both irretrievably: thus my prudent friendship would reproach itself, were I to employ them further.

Once having the key, there remain some precautions for us to take against the noise of door and lock; but they are very easy. You will find, beneath the same press where I placed your paper, oil and a feather. You sometimes go to your room at times when you are alone there: you must profit by it to oil the lock and hinges. The only attention you need pay is to be careful of stains which might betray you. You had better wait also until night arrives, because, if it be done with the intelligence of which you are

capable, there will be no trace of it on the following morning. If, however, it should be perceived, then you must say that it is the indoor polisher. You must in this case specify the time, and even the conversation which you had with him: as, for instance, that he takes this precaution against rust with all the locks which are not in use. For you see that it would be unlikely that you should have witnessed this proceeding without asking the reason. It is these little details which give probability; and probability renders a lie without consequence, by diminishing people's desire to verify it.

After you have read this letter, I beg you to read it again and even to study it; to begin with, one should be well acquainted with what one wishes to do well; next, to assure yourself that I have omitted nothing. Little accustomed to employ *finesse* on my own account, I have no great use for it; indeed it needed nothing less than my keen friendship for Danceny, and the interest which you inspire in me, to induce me to employ these means, however innocent they may be. I hate anything which has the air of deception; that is my character. But your misfortunes have touched me to such a degree that I will attempt everything to alleviate them.

You can imagine that, with this means of communication once established between us, it will be far easier for me to procure for you the interview with Danceny which he desires. However, do not yet speak to him of all this: you would only increase his impatience, and the moment for satisfying it is not yet quite arrived. You owe it to him, I think, to calm rather than to excite him. I depend in this matter on your delicacy. Adieu, my fair pupil, for you are my pupil. Love your tutor a little, and above all be docile to him; you will be rewarded. I am occupied with your happiness; rest assured that I shall find therein my own.

At the Château de..., 24th August, 17''.



## LETTER THE EIGHTY-FIFTH

*The Marquise de Merteuil to the Vicomte de Valmont*

**A**T last you may be tranquil, and, above all, you can render me justice. Listen, and do not confound me again with other women. I have brought my adventure with Prévau to a close. *To a close!* Do you fully understand what that implies? Now you shall judge whether it is I, or he, who can vaunt himself. The story will not be as amusing as the adventure: neither would it be just that you, who have done no more than reason ill or well about the affair, should reap as much pleasure from it as I, who have given my time and labour.

In the meantime, if you have some great scheme to try, if you would attempt some enterprise in which this dangerous rival should seem to you to be feared, this is your time. He leaves the field free to you, at least for some time; perhaps, even, he will never recover from the blow I have given him.

How fortunate you are to have me for a friend! I am a benevolent fairy to you. You languish afar from the beauty who engrosses you; I say one word, and you find yourself once more at her side. You wish to revenge yourself on a woman who injures you; I point out to you the place where you have to strike, and

abandon her to your tender mercies. Finally, to drive a formidable competitor from the lists, it is once more I whom you invoke, and I give heed to you. Truly, if you do not spend your life in thanking me, it means that you are an ingrate. I return to my adventure and take it up from the beginning.

The *rendez-vous* made so loudly, on leaving the Opera, was understood as I had hoped. Prévan repaired to it; and when the Maréchale said to him politely that she congratulated herself on seeing him twice in succession at her days, he was careful to reply that, since Tuesday night, he had cancelled a thousand engagements, in order that he might thus dispose of that evening. *A bon entendeur, salut!* As I wished, however, to know with more certainty whether I was, or was not, the veritable object of this flattering zeal, I resolved to compel the new aspirant to choose between me and his dominant passion. I declared that I should not play; and he, on his side, found a thousand pretexts for not playing, and my first triumph was over.

I secured the Bishop of\*\*\* for my gossip; I chose him because of his intimacy with the hero of the day, to whom I wished to give every facility to approach me. I was contented also to have a respectable witness, who could, at need, depose to my behaviour and my language. This arrangement was successful,

After the vague and customary remarks, Prévan, having soon made himself the leader of the conversation, tried different tones in turn, in order to discover which was likely to please me. I refused that of sentiment, as though I had no faith in it; I stopped, by my seriousness, his gaiety, which seemed to me too frivolous for a *début*; he fell back upon delicate friendship; and it was beneath this well-worn flag that we began our reciprocal attack.

At supper-time, the Bishop did not descend; Prévan then gave me his hand, and was naturally placed by my side at table. One must be just; he maintained with much skill our private conversation, while seeming only to be occupied with the general conversa-

tion, to which he had the air of being the largest contributor. . At dessert, they spoke of a new piece which was to be given on the following Monday at the *Français*. I expressed some regret that I had not my box; he offered me his own, which at first, as is the usage, I refused: to which he answered humorously enough, that I did not understand him; that certainly, he would not make the sacrifice of his box to anyone whom he did not know; but that he only let me know it was at Madame la Maréchale's disposal. She lent herself to this pleasantry, and I accepted.

On our return to the *salon*, he asked, as you may well believe, for a place in this box; and when the Maréchale, who treats him with great kindness, promised him it, *if he were good*, he made it the occasion of one of those double-edged conversations, at which you have extolled his talent to me. Indeed, having fallen on his knees, like a submissive child, he said, under pretext of begging for her counsel and asking her opinion, he uttered many a flattering and tender thing, the application of which I could easily take to myself. Several persons having not returned to play after supper, the conversation was more general and less interesting: but our eyes spoke much. I say our eyes: I should have said his; for mine spoke but one language—that of surprise. He must have thought I was astonished, and quite absorbed in the prodigious effect which he had on me. I think I left him highly satisfied; I was no less pleased myself.

On the following Monday I was at the *Français*, as we had agreed. In spite of your literary curiosity, I can tell you nothing of the performance, except that Prévan has a marvellous talent for cajolery, and that the piece failed: that is all that I learned. I was sorry to see the evening come to an end; it had really pleased me mightily; and, in order to prolong it, I invited the Maréchale to come and sup with me: this gave me a pretext for proposing it to the amiable flatterer, who only asked time to hasten to the Comtesses de P\*\*\*, and free himself from an engagement. This

name brought back all my anger; I saw plainly that he was going to begin his confidences; I remembered your wise counsels, and promised myself... to proceed with the adventure; I was certain that I should cure him of this dangerous indiscretion.

Being new to my company, which was not very numerous that evening, he owed me the customary usages; thus, when we went to supper, he offered me his hand. I was malicious enough, when accepting it, to allow mine to tremble slightly, and to walk with my eyes cast down, and a quick respiration. I had the air of having a presentiment of my defeat, and of being afraid of my victor. He noticed it readily; then the traitor promptly changed his tone and aspect. He had been gallant, he became tender. It was not that his language did not remain much the same: circumstances compelled that; but his gaze had become less keen and more caressing; the inflexion of his voice softer; his smile was no longer the smile of *finesse*, but of satisfaction. Finally, in his conversation, suppressing more and more the fire of his sallies, wit gave place to delicacy. I ask you, could you have done better yourself.

On my side, I grew pensive to such a point that the company was forced to perceive it; and when I was reproached for it, I was clever enough to defend myself indifferently, and to cast on Prévau a rapid, yet shy and embarrassed glance, that was to make him believe that all my fear was lest he should divine the cause of my trouble.

After supper, I profited by the moment when the good Maréchale was telling one of those stories which she is always telling, to settle myself on my ottoman, in that languorous condition which is induced by a tender *rêverie*. I was not sorry that Prévau should see me thus: in truth, he honoured me with most particular attention. You may well imagine that my timid glances did not dare to seek the eyes of my conqueror: but directed towards him in a more humble fashion, they soon informed me that I was obtaining the effect

which I sought to produce. I still needed to persuade him that I shared it; so that, when the Maréchale announced she was going to retire, I cried out in a faint and tender voice, "*Ah Dieu!* I was so comfortable here!" I rose, however: but, before taking leave of her, I asked her her plans, in order to have a pretext for telling her mine, and of letting her know that I should stay at home the whole of the following day. Upon this, we all separated.

I then started reflecting. I had no doubt but that Prévau would profit by the sort of *rendez-vous* I had given him; that he would come early enough to find me alone, and that the attack would be a fierce one: but I was quite sure also that, owing to my reputation, he would not treat me with that lightness which is only employed with women of occasion or with those who have no experience; and I foresaw a certain success, if he pronounced the word love, above all, if he had the pretension of obtaining it from me.

How convenient it is to have dealings with you *people of principles*! Sometimes a clumsy lover disconcerts us by his bashfulness or embarrasses us with his fiery transports; it is a fever which, like the other, has its chills and ardours, and sometimes varies in its symptoms. But the even tenor of your way is so easily divined!

The arrival, the aspect, the tone, the language: I knew it all the day before.

I will not report our conversation to you, then; you will easily supply it for yourself. Only remark that, in my *feigned defence*, I aided him with all my power: embarrassment, to give him time to speak; sorry reasons, that he might combat them; distrust and fear, to revive his protestations; and that perpetual refrain on his side of *I ask you only for a word*; and the silence on mine, which seemed but to delay him in order to make him desire the more: during all that, a hand seized a hundred times, a hand always withdrawn yet never refused. One might pass a whole day thus; we passed a mortal hour: we should be there, perhaps, still, if we

had not heard a carriage entering my court-yard. This fortunate occurrence naturally rendered his entreaties livelier; and I, seeing the moment arrive when I was out of danger of being surprised, prepared myself by a long sigh, and granted him the precious word. The visitor was announced, and soon afterwards, I was surrounded by a numerous circle.

Prévan begged to be allowed to come on the following morning, and I consented: but, careful to defend myself, I ordered my waiting-maid to remain all through the time of this visit in my bed-chamber, whence, you know, one can see all that passes in my dressing-room, and it was there that I received him. Free in our conversation and having both the same desire, we were soon in agreement: but it was necessary to get rid of this inopportune spectator; it was for that I was waiting.

Then, painting an imaginative picture of my home life, I persuaded him without difficulty that we should never find a moment's liberty, and that he must consider as a sort of miracle that which we had enjoyed yesterday, and even that contained too great a risk for me to expose myself to, since at any moment someone might enter my *salon*. I did not fail to add that all these usages were established, because, until that day, they had never interfered with me; and I insisted at the same time upon the impossibility of changing them without compromising myself in the eyes of my household. He attempted sadness, assumed ill-humour, told me that I had little love; and you can guess how much all that touched me! But, wishing to strike the decisive blow, I summoned tears to my aid. It was precisely the *Zaire, you are weeping*. The empire which he thought to have gained over me, and the hope he had conceived of compassing my ruin at his will, stood him in good stead for all the love of *Orosmane*.

This dramatic scene accomplished, we returned to our arrangements. The day being out of the question, we turned our attention to the night: but my Swiss became an insurmountable obstacle,

and I would not permit any attempt to bribe him. He suggested the wicket-gate of my garden; but this I had foreseen, and I invented a dog who, although calm and silent enough by day, became a real demon at night. The case with which I entered into all these details was well fitted to embolden him. Thus he went on to propose the most ridiculous of expedients to me, and it was this which I accepted.

To begin with, his servant was as trusty as himself: in this he did not lie to me; the one was quite as little so as the other. I was to give a great supper at my house; he was to be there, and was to select a moment when he could leave alone. The cunning confidant would call his carriage, open the door, whilst he, Prévau, would slip adroitly out on one side. In no way could his coachman perceive this; so that, whilst everybody believed him to have left, he had really remained with me: the question remained whether he could reach my apartment. I confess that, at first, I had some difficulty in finding reasons against this project weak enough for him to be able to destroy: he answered me with instances. To hear him, nothing was more ordinary than this method: he himself had often employed it; it was even that one which he used the most, as being the least dangerous.

Subjugated by these irrefutable authorities, I admitted with candour that I had a private staircase which led to the near neighbourhood of my *boudoir*; that I could leave the key of it, and it was possible for him to shut himself in there and wait, without undue risk, until my women had retired; and then, to give more probability to my consent, the moment after I was unwilling: I only relented on the condition of a perfect docility, of a propriety—oh, a propriety! In short I was quite willing to prove my love to him, but not so much to gratify his own.

The exit, of which I was forgetting to tell you, was to be made by the wicket-gate of my garden; it was only a matter of waiting for daybreak, when the Cerberus would not utter a sound. Not a

soul passes at that hour, and people are in the soundest slumber. If you are astonished at this heap of sorry reasons, it is because you forget our reciprocal situation. What need had we of better ones? He asked nothing better than for the thing to be known, and as for me, I was quite certain that it should not be known. The next day but one was the day fixed.

You will notice that there is the affair settled, and that no one has yet seen Prévan in my society. I meet him at supper at the house of one of my friends, he offers her his box for a new piece, and I accept a place in it. I invite this woman to supper, during the piece and before Prévan; I can hardly avoid inviting him to be of the party. He accepts, and pays me two days later the visit exacted by custom. 'Tis true, he comes to see me on the morning of the next day; but besides the fact that morning visits no longer count, it only rests with me to find this one too free; and in fact I put him in the category of persons less intimate with me, by a written invitation to a supper of ceremony. I can well cry, with Annette: "*Albeit that is all!*"

The fatal day having come, the day on which I was to lose my virtue and my reputation, I gave my instructions to the faithful Victoire, and she executed them as you will presently see. In the meantime, evening arrived. I had already a great company with me, when Prévan was announced. I received him with a marked politeness, which testified to the slightness of my acquaintance with him; and I put him by the side of the Maréchale, as being the person through whom I had made it. The evening produced nothing but a very short note, which the discreet lover found a means of giving me, and which, according to my custom, I burned. It informed me that I could trust him; and this essential word was surrounded by all the parasitical words, such as love, happiness, etc., which never fail to appear at such a festival.

By midnight, the rubbers being over, I proposed a short medley. I had the double design of favouring Prévan's escape, and at the



same time of causing it to be noticed ; that could not fail to happen, considering his reputation as a gamester. I was not sorry, either, that it might be remembered, if need were, that I had not been in a hurry to be left alone. The game lasted longer than I had thought. The devil tempted me, and I was succumbing to my desire to console the impatient prisoner. I was thus rushing to my ruin, when I reflected that, once having quite surrendered, I should not have the sufficient control my plans required. I had the strength to resist. I retraced my steps, and returned, [not without some ill-humour, to resume my place at the eternal game. It finished, however, and every one left. As for me, I rang for my women undressed very rapidly, and sent them also away.

Can you see me, Vicomte, in my light toilette, walking with timid and circumspect steps to open the door to my conqueror? He saw me; lightning is not more prompt. What shall I say to you? I was vanquished, quite vanquished, before I could say one word to arrest him or defend myself. He then wanted to take a convenient position and one more suitable to the circumstances. He cursed his finery which, he said, kept him aloof from me: he would combat me with equal arms: and my soft caresses did not leave him time. He was occupied with other things.

His rights were redoubled, his pretensions were renewed; but then: "Listen to me," I said; "you will have thus far a merry-story enough to tell the two Comtesses de P'", and a thousand others; but I am curious to know how you will relate the end of the adventure." Speaking thus, I rang the bell with all my strength. For once it was my turn, and my action was quicker than my speech. He had only stammered out something, when I heard Victoire running up and calling the servants, whom she had kept near her, as I had ordered. Then, assuming my queenly tone, raising my voice: "Leave me, Monsieur," I went on, "and, never come into my presence again." Whereupon a crowd of my people entered.

Poor Prévan lost his head, and, fancying an ambush in what was

at bottom no more than a joke, he belook himself to his sword. It did him no good, for my *valet-de-chambre*, who is brave and active, caught him round the body and hurled him to the ground. I was in a mortal fright, I vow. I cried to them to cease, and bade them let him retreat unmolested, so long as they made certain that he was gone. My men obeyed me : but there was great commotion amongst them ; they were indignant that anyone should have dared to fail in respect towards *their virtuous mistress*. They all accompanied the unfortunate Chevalier, noisily and with the scandal which I desired. Victoire only stayed behind, and we occupied ourselves during this interval in repairing the disorder of my bed.

My household returned in the same state of commotion ; and I, *still upset by my emotion*, asked them by what lucky chance they happened to be not yet gone to bed. Victoire then related to me how she had asked two women friends to supper, how they had sat up with her, and, in short, all that we had together agreed upon. I thanked them all, and let them retire, bidding one of them, however, to go immediately and summon my physician. It seemed to me that I was justified in fearing ill effects from *my mortal fright* ; and it was a sure means of giving wind and celebrity to the news. He came in effect, condoled with me mightily, and prescribed repose. In addition, I bade Victoire go abroad early in the morning and gossip in the neighbourhood.

Everything succeeded so well that, before noon, and as soon as I was awake, my pious neighbour was already at my bedside, to know the truth and the details of this terrible adventure. I was obliged to moan with her for an hour over the corruption of the age. A moment later, I received from the Maréchale the note which I enclose. Finally, about five o'clock, to my great astonishment, Monsieur... arrived. He came, he told me, to bring his excuses that an officier of his regiment should have been so grossly wanting in respect. He had only heard of it at dinner, at the Maréchale's, and had immediately sent word to Prévau to consider himself

under arrest. I asked for his pardon, and he refused it me. I then thought that, as an accomplice, I ought to dispatch myself on my side, and at least keep myself under strict guard. I caused my door to be shut, and word to be given that I was indisposed.

'Tis to my solitude that you owe this long letter! I shall write one to Madame de Volanges, which she will be sure to read aloud, and from which you will hear this story as it is to be told. I forgot to tell you that Belleruche is enraged, and absolutely wants to fight Prévan. The poor fellow! Luckily I shall have time to calm his head. In the meantime, I am going to repose my own, which is tired with writing. Adieu, Vicomte.

Paris, 25th September, 1777.

## LETTER THE EIGHTY-SIXTH

*The Maréchale de \*\*\* to the Marquise de Merteuil*

(A note enclosed in the preceding one)

**A**n, Heavens! what do I hear, my dear Madame? Is it possible that that little Prévan should commit such abominations? And to you above all! What is one not exposed to! One is no longer safe in one's own house! Truly such events console one for being old. But that for which I shall never console myself is, that I have been partly the cause of your receiving such a monster at your house. I promise you that, if what I am told is true, he shall never more set foot within my doors; that is the course which all nice persons will adopt towards him, if they do their duty.

I am told that you have been quite ill, and I am anxious about your health. Give me, I pray you, your precious news, or send it by one of your women, if you cannot come yourself. I only ask a word to reassure me. I should have hastened to you this morning, had it not been for my baths, which my doctor will not allow me to interrupt; and I must go to Versailles this afternoon, always on my nephew's business.

Adieu, dear Madame; count upon my sincere friendship for life.

Paris, 25th September, 1777.



## LETTER THE EIGHTY-SEVENTH

### *The Marquise de Mertenil to Madame de Volanges*

I WRITE to you from my bed, my dear, kind friend. The most disagreeable event, and the most impossible to have foreseen, has made me ill with fright and annoyance. It is, assuredly, not because I have aught to reproach myself with; but it is always so painful for a virtuous woman, who retains the modesty which becomes her sex, to have public attention drawn upon her that I would give anything in the world to have been able to avoid this unhappy adventure; and I am still uncertain whether I may not decide to go to the country and wait until it be forgotten. This is the affair I allude to.

I met at the Maréchale de \*\*\*'s a certain M. de Prévan, whom you are sure to know by name, and whom I knew in no other way. But, meeting him at such a house, I was, it seems to me, quite justified in believing him to be of good society. He is well enough made personally, and seemed to me not lacking in wit. Chance and the tedium of play left me the only woman alone with him and the Bishop of\*\*\*, the rest of the company being occupied with lansquenets. The three of us conversed together till supper-time. At the table, a new piece, of which there was some talk, gave him the occasion

to offer his box to the Maréchale, who accepted it : and it was arranged that I should have a place in it. It was for Monday last at the *Français*. As the Maréchale was coming to sup with me at the close of the performance, I proposed to this gentleman to accompany her, and he came. Two days later he paid me a visit, which passed with the customary compliments, and without the occurrence of anything marked. On the following day, he came to see me in the morning, and this appeared to me a trifle bold ; but I thought that, instead of making him feel this by my fashion of receiving him, it were better to remind him, by a politeness, that we were not yet on so intimate a footing as he seemed to imply. To this end I sent him that same day a very dry and very ceremonious invitation for a supper that 'I was' giving the day before yesterday. I did not speak four words to him all the evening ; and he, on his side, retired as soon as his game was finished. You will admit that thus far nothing has less the air of leading up to an adventure : after the other games, we played a medley which lasted till nearly two o'clock, and finally I went to bed.

It must have been a mortal half hour at least after my women had retired, when I heard a noise in my room. I opened my curtains with much alarm, and saw a man enter by the door which leads into my *boudoir*. I uttered a piercing cry ; and I recognized, by the light of my nightlight, this M. de Prévan, who, with inconceivable effrontery, told me not to alarm myself ; that he would enlighten me as to the mystery of his conduct ; and that he begged me not to make any noise. Thus speaking, he lit a candle ; I was so confounded that I could not speak. His tranquil and assured air petrified me, I think, even more. But he had not said two words, when I saw what this pretended mystery was ; and my only reply, as you will believe, was to clutch my bell-rope. By an incredible piece of good fortune, all my household had been sitting up with one of my women, and were not yet in bed. My chamber-

maid, who, on coming to me, heard me speaking with much heat, was alarmed, and summoned all this company. You can imagine what a scandal! My people were furious; there was a moment when I thought my *valet-de-chambre* would kill Prévan. I confess that, at the moment, I was quite relieved to find myself in force: on reflexion to-day, I should have found it preferable if only my chamber-maid had come; she would have sufficed, and I should, perhaps, have escaped all this noise which afflicts me.

In place of that, the tumult awoke the neighbours, the household talked, and it is the gossip of all Paris since yesterday. M. de Prévan is in prison by order of the commanding-officer of his regiment, who had the courtesy to call upon me to offer me his excuses, he said. This arrest will still further augment the noise, but I could not obtain that it should be otherwise. The Town and the Court have been to inscribe their names at my door, which I have closed to everyone. The few persons I have seen tell me that justice is rendered me, and that public indignation against Prévan is at its height: assuredly, he well merits it, but that does not detract from the disagreeableness of this adventure. Moreover, the man has certainly some friends; and his friends are bound to be mischievous; who knows, who can tell what they will invent to my injury? Ah, Lord! how unfortunate to be a young woman! She has done nothing yet, when she has put herself out of the reach of slander she has need even to give the lie to calumny.

Write me, I beg of you, what you would have done, what you would do in my place; in short, all your thoughts. It is always from you that I receive the sweetest consolation and the most prudent counsel; it is from you also that I love best to receive it.

Adieu, my dear and kind friend; you know the sentiments which forever attach me to you. I embrace your amiable daughter.

Paris, 26th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.



## LETTER THE EIGHTY-EIGHTH.

*Cécile Volanges to the Vicomte de Valmont*

**I**N spite of all the pleasure that I take, Monsieur, in the letters of M. le Chevalier Danceny, and although I am no less desirous than he is that we might be able to see one another again without hindrance, I have not, however, dared to do what you suggest to me.

In the first place, it is too dangerous; this key, which you want me to put in the other's place, is like enough to it, in truth; but not so much so, however, that the difference is not to be seen, and Mamma looks at and takes notice of everything. Again, although it has not yet been made use of since we have been here, there needs but a mischance; and, if it was to be perceived, I should be lost for ever. And then, it seems to me too that it would be very wrong; to make a duplicate key like that: it is very strong! It is true that it is you who would be kind enough to undertake it; but in spite of that, if it became known, I should, none the less, have to bear the blame and the odium, since it would be for me that you had done it. Lastly, I have twice tried to take it, and certainly it would be easy enough if it were anything else: but I do not know why, I always started trembling, and have never had the courage. I think then we had better stay as we are.

If you continue to have the kindness to be as complaisant as hitherto, you will easily find a means of giving me a letter. Even with the last, but for the ill chance which made you suddenly turn round at a certain moment, we should have been quite secure. I can quite feel that you cannot, like myself, be thinking only of that; but I would rather have more patience and not risk so much. I am sure that M. Danceny would speak as I do: for, every time that he wanted something which caused me too much pain, he always consented that it should not be.

I will give you back, Monsieur, at the same time as this letter, your own, that of M. Danceny, and your key. I am none the less grateful for all your kindnesses, and I beseech you to continue them. It is very true that I am most unhappy, and without you I should be even more so; but, after all, she is my mother; I must needs have patience. And provided that M. Danceny goes on loving me, and you do not abandon me, perhaps a happier time will come.

I have the honour to be, Monsieur, with much gratitude, your most humble and obedient servant.

At the Château de . . . , 26th September, 1777.

## LETTER THE EIGHTY-NINTH

*The Vicomte de Valmont to the Chevalier Danceny*

**I**F your affairs do not always advance as quickly as you could wish, my friend, it is not entirely me whom you must blame. I have more than one obstacle to overcome here. The vigilance and severity of Madame de Volanges are not the only ones; your young friend also throws some in my way. Whether from coldness or timidity, she does not always do as I advise her; and I think, none the less, that I know better than she what must be done.

I had found a sure and simple means of giving her your letters, and even of facilitating, subsequently, the interviews which you desire: but I could not persuade her to employ it. I am all the more distressed at this, as I cannot see any other means of bringing you together; and as, even with your correspondence, I am constantly afraid of compromising us all three. Now you may imagine that I am no more anxious to run that risk myself than to expose either of you to it.

I should be truly grieved, however, if your little friend's lack of confidence were to prevent me from being useful to you; perhaps, you would do well to write to her on the subject. Consider what you want to do, it is for you alone to decide; for it is not enough

to serve one's friends, one must also serve them in their own manner. This might also be one means the more to assure yourself of her sentiments towards you ; for the woman who keeps a will of her own does not love as much as she says.

'Tis not that I suspect your mistress of inconstancy : but she is very young ; she has a great fear of her Mamma, who, as you know, only seeks to injure you ; and perhaps it would be dangerous to stay too long without occupying her with you. Do not, however, render yourself unduly anxious by what I tell you. I have at bottom no reason for distrust ; it is entirely the solicitude of friendship.

I do not write to you at greater length, because I too have certain affairs of my own. I am not as far advanced as you, but I am as fond ; that is a consoling thought ; and, even if I should not succeed for myself, if I succeed in being useful to you, I shall consider that my time has been well employed. Adieu, my friend.

At the Château de . . . , 26th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

## LETTER THE NINETEETH

*The Présidente de Tourvel to the Vicomte de Valmont.*

I AM greatly desirous, Monsieur, that this letter should not cause you any distress; or that, if it must do so, it may be at least softened by that which I experience in writing to you. You must know me well enough by this time to be well assured that it is not my wish to grieve you; but neither would you wish, doubtless, to plunge me into eternal despair. I conjure you then, in the name of the tender friendship which I have promised you, in the name, even, of the sentiments, perhaps more vivid, but assuredly not more sincere, which you have for me: let us cease to see one another; depart; and, in the meantime, let us shun all those private and too perilous interviews in which, forced by some inconceivable power, though I never succeed in saying what I wish to say to you, I pass my time in listening to what I never ought to hear.

Only yesterday, when you came to join me in the park, my sole intention was to tell you that which I am writing to you to-day; and yet, what did I do, but occupy myself with your love—your love—to which I am bound never to respond! Ah, for pity's sake remove yourself from me!

Do not think that absence will ever alter my sentiments for you:

how shall I ever succeed in overcoming them, when I have no longer the courage to combat them? You see, I tell you all; I fear less to confess my weakness than to succumb to it: but that control which I have lost over my feelings I shall retain over my actions; yes, I shall retain it, I am resolved, be it at the cost of my life.

Alas! the time is not far distant when I believed myself very sure of never having such struggles to undergo. I congratulated myself, I vaunted myself for this, perhaps overmuch. Heaven has punished, cruelly punished, this pride: but, full of mercy, at the very moment when it strikes us it forewarns me again before a fall; and I should be doubly guilty if I continued to fail in prudence, warned as I am already that I have no more strength.

You have told me a hundred times that you would have none of a happiness purchased by my tears. Ah! let us speak no more of happiness, but leave me to regain some calm.

In acceding to my request, what fresh rights do you not acquire over my heart? And from those rights, founded upon virtue, I shall have need to defend myself. What pleasure I shall take in my gratitude! I shall owe you the sweetness of lasting without remorse a delicious sentiment. At present, on the contrary, terrified by my sentiments, by my thoughts, I am equally afraid of occupying myself with either you or myself, the very idea of you alarms me: when I cannot escape it; I combat it; I do not drive it from me, but I repel it.

Is it not better for both of us to put a stop to this state of trouble and anxiety? Oh, you, whose ever sensitive soul, even in the midst of its errors, has continued the friend of virtue, you will respect my painful situation, you will not reject my prayer! A sweeter, but not less tender interest will succeed to these violent agitations: then, breathing again through your benevolence, I shall cherish existence, and shall say, in the joy of my heart: This calm; I owe it to my friend.

In causing you to undergo a few deprivations, which I do not

impose upon you, but which I beg of you, will you think you are buying the end of my torments at too dear a price? Ah! if, to make you happy, I had but to consent to unhappiness, you may believe me, I would not hesitate for a moment... But to become guilty!... No, my friend, no; rather would I die a thousand deaths. Already, assailed by shame, on the eve of remorse, I dread both others and myself; I blush in the midst of company, and tremble in solitude; I lead only a life of pain; I shall have no peace unless you consent. My most praiseworthy resolutions do not suffice to reassure me; I formed this one yesterday, and yet I have passed the night in tears.

Behold your friend, she whom you love, suppliant and confused, begging you for innocence and repose. Ah, God! But for you, would she ever have been reduced to so humiliating a request? I reproach you with nothing; I feel too strongly, myself, how difficult it is to resist an imperious sentiment. A complaint is not a reproach. Do, out of generosity, what I do from duty; and to all the sentiments which you have inspired in me, I will add that of eternal gratitude. Adieu, Monsieur, adieu.

At the Château de . . . , 27th September, 17<sup>th</sup>.

